

INTERESTING  
V I E W S  
OF  
CHRISTIANITY:  
BEING A  
TRANSLATION  
OF PART OF A WORK OF THE CELEBRATED  
M. <sup>C</sup> B O N N E T,  
ENTITLED  
RECHERCHES PHILOSOPHIQUES  
SUR LES  
PREUVES DU CHRISTIANISME.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

**T**HE first part of the original work, containing such disquisitions, as, it was apprehended, would not be generally acceptable, is on that account omitted. It is hoped, that the subsequent part of the work will please every class of readers.



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## INTRODUCTION.

**T**HE author in the second part of the work, proceeds to consider the foundations and nature of testimony, and whether any human testimony, however perfect and certain, is sufficient to establish the certainty or probability of facts, which are in opposition to the ordinary course of nature. The merit of witnesses is to be estimated by two general and essential conditions, their capacity and integrity. If the witnesses are men of plain, common sense, they will be sufficiently capable of judging of palpable facts, and can easily ascertain that there is no mistake.

take. But because the most palpable facts may be altered or disguised by imposture or interest, testimony supposes acknowledged probity and disinterestedness in the witnesses. Since the probability of any fact increases according to the number of the deponents, testimony requires that this number be sufficiently great. And because a fact is always better known, the more circumstantial it is, and because a secret combination amongst the deponents is never less presumable, than when the depositions comprehend the essential circumstances of the fact, without resembling each other in manner and in form, testimony demands circumstantial depositions, which concur together, and yet are varied in form and expressions. If  
it

it should happen, that certain facts, attested by different eye-witnesses, run counter to their most ancient, most deeply-rooted, and most beloved prejudices, the fidelity of their depositions will increase in proportion to the certainty that they were deeply tinctured with those prejudices. If it should be found at the same time, that the witnesses united to the most essential conditions of testimony, some transcendent qualities not to be discovered in ordinary witnesses; if to sound sense and irreproachable manners they joined eminent virtues, the most universal, constant, and active benevolence; if this had never been denied by their very enemies; if they persevered in their testimony with heroic constancy, and even sealed it with their blood,



blood, it would appear, that such a testimony must have all the force of which human testimony can be susceptible. If, therefore, the witnesses whom the Messenger has chosen, unite in their own persons so many ordinary and extraordinary conditions, I should think, says the author, that I could not reject their depositions without acting in direct violence to my reason.

But, continues he, it is undoubtedly the first condition of testimony, that the facts attested be not physically impossible, or contrary to the laws of nature. Now the most constant experience declares against the physical possibility of the resurrection of the dead. Nevertheless, witnesses, supposed highly worthy  
of



of credit, attest, that a dead man has risen again. It appears less probable, says M. Bonnet, that a witness eminently virtuous would attest a falsehood, than that a body should undergo a modification contrary to the common course of nature; because, says he, I clearly discover a cause and end for this modification; but far from discovering any sufficient reason why such a witness should deceive me, I discover, on the contrary, many very powerful motives to induce him to conceal the fact, if the love of the truth had not predominated in his breast.— And if several witnesses of this description concur in attesting the same miraculous fact; if they constantly persist in their depositions; if by so

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doing

doing they evidently expose themselves to the greatest calamities, and to death itself, the imposture of such witnesses would be a violation of the laws of the moral world, which could not be supposed, without contradicting all the notions of common sense. Experience indeed proves, that according to the common course of nature, the dead do not rise again; but it can never prove, that it is physically impossible for the dead to rise again. From the uniformity of the course of nature, it can never be logically argued against the testimony, that this uniformity is not *constant*: for the experience which attests the uniformity of the course of nature, does not in the least degree prove, that  
this

this course cannot be changed or modified\*.

It would also be a contradiction to all the notions of common sense to imagine, that such witnesses could be *deceived*. For it is supposed, that they attested very palpable facts, of which the senses could judge as well as of any other facts, and which the witnesses were very much interested to have ascertained. The senses surely were sufficient to ascertain that a paralytic walks, that a blind man sees, that a dead man rises again. The supposition, that such witnesses could not be deceivers, is principally founded on their inte.

\* Vid. Dr. Campbell's Essay on Miracles, and particularly the Notes of the French Translator.

grity. And the probability of this supposition would be very much augmented, if the facts in question were of such a nature, that they could not be believed by men of good sense, if they had not been true. A false doctrine, no doubt, may easily gain credit: for it is the province of the understanding to judge of doctrine, and it may not be always provided with the knowledge necessary for discovering *falsehood* in certain cases. But as to things which affect all the senses, things of public notoriety, things which happen in times and places full of gainfayers, things which combat national, political, and religious prejudices, how could impostors, who had not entirely lost their senses, flatter themselves for a single moment that they  
could



could procure credit to such things? Surely they would not think of persuading their own countrymen and contemporaries, that a man, known by all the world, and who died in public, was risen again: that at the death of this man, there was darkness over the whole country for several hours; that the earth shook, &c. If these impostors are illiterate men, and of the lowest rank, it would be still farther from their thoughts to pretend to speak foreign languages, and they would not dare to throw upon a numerous society the absurd reproach, that it abuses an extraordinary gift, which it had never received. It is not at all probable, that such facts could ever have been admitted, had they been false. This would appear still more



improbable, if they who publicly professed to believe such facts, and who spread them abroad, voluntarily exposed themselves to every thing most dreadful to human nature, and if, at the same time, no trace of fanaticism be perceived in their depositions. In fine, the improbability of the thing would appear to increase very much, if the public testimony given to such facts had produced a revolution much more astonishing than those which the most famous conquerors ever produced.

But though the miracles of the Gospel should be attended with all the circumstances which reason demands, and which have been above described, still there are some fundamental objections, which the author endeavours to remove.

He

He observes, that the religious annals of all nations are replete with miracles and prodigies; and that there is scarcely one religious opinion which does not produce miracles, and even martyrs in its favour. The human mind delights in the marvellous: it has a kind of innate taste for every thing extraordinary or new: it is always struck with relations of prodigies: it lends them, at least, an attentive ear, and often believes them without examination: it even seems not to be too much disposed to doubt, but loves rather to believe.

These natural dispositions of the human mind tend very much to increase, in thinking minds, a general distrust of every thing which has

the air of a miracle, and must engage them to be very scrupulous of admitting the proofs, which are adduced in matters of this kind.

But will the visions of alchymy determine a philosopher to reject the truths of chemistry? Because many books in physics and history contain fallacious observations, controvertible and rashly hazarded facts, will a rational sceptic draw a general conclusion against all books of physics and history? Will he extend this conclusion to all the observations, to all the facts indiscriminately?

If many religious opinions have borrowed the aid of miracles, this very circumstance would seem to prove, that at all times miracles have

have been considered as the most expressive language which the Divinity could address to men, and as the most characteristic seal which he could affix to the mission of his messengers.

Upon comparing the miracles, attested by the witnesses, whose depositions are afterwards to be more particularly examined, with the facts produced in favour of certain religious opinions, the most enormous difference is apparent. The former seem so superior in kind, in number, in diversity, in unity, in duration, in notoriety, in their direct and particular utility, and especially in the importance of their general design, in the magnitude of their consequences, and the force of their testimonies,



nies, that it must be admitted they are at least very probable ; while the others must be rejected, as mere inventions, equally ridiculous in themselves, and unworthy of the wisdom and majesty of the Lord of the world.

If in the most enlightened age of the world, and in the capital of a great kingdom, miracles were pretended to be wrought by convulsions ; if a man high in office has published those pretended miracles ; if he has endeavoured to support them by different testimonies ; if a numerous society has adduced those facts, as proofs of the truth of its opinion respecting a passage in a treatise of theology ; in all this nothing can be seen but a burlesque

inven-



invention, demonstrating the most amazing deviations of human reason.

Because error has had its martyrs as well as the truth, martyrs cannot be considered as undoubted proofs of the truth of an opinion: but if men of virtue and good sense suffer martyrdom in support of an opinion, it may be lawfully concluded, that they were persuaded, at least, of the truth of that opinion. If upon enquiring, therefore, into the foundations of that opinion, it be found, that those were facts, which were so palpable, so numerous, so different, so linked together, and so connected with a most important end, that it was morally impossible that the witnesses could be deceiv-

deceived, their martyrdom must be considered as the last seal of their testimony.

And if the declared enemies of the witnesses, their own countrymen and contemporaries, should ascribe the greatest part of the miraculous facts to a cause very different from that assigned by the witnesses, this circumstance would appear an indirect acknowledgment of those facts: for men do not ascribe a cause for facts which they think false; but they deny them, and prove their falsity, if they are able to do so.— This acknowledgment will acquire great force, if those enemies of the witnesses were at the same time their lawful superiors, and if they possessed all the means which power and  
author

authority can supply, to confute a presumptuous imposture ; and if they never confuted it. What should we think then, if we learned that the witnesses, whom their own magistrates could not confound, constantly persevered in charging those magistrates with the greatest of crimes, and that they even dared to accuse them face to face ?



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INTERESTING VIEWS  
O F  
CHRISTIANITY.

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SECTION I.

GENERAL CHARACTERS OF THE  
WITNESSES OF THE GOSPEL,  
AND OF THEIR DEPOSITION.

A BOOK, said to contain the faithful depositions of men, who call themselves witnesses and servants of a Messenger from heaven, is put into my hand. I examine this book with all possible attention, and confess, the more I examine it, the more



more I am struck with the characters of probability, originality, and grandeur, which I discover in it, and which, in my opinion, render it a most singular and inimitable work.

The elevation of thought, the majestic simplicity of expression ; the beauty, the purity and harmony of the doctrine ; the importance, universality, and small number of the precepts ; their admirable suitability to the nature and necessities of man ; the ardent charity so generously enforced ; the unction, the force and gravity of the language ; its concealed and truly philosophical meaning ; these especially arrest my attention, because I do not find them in any production of the human mind,

mind, in the same degree of excellence.

I am, at the same time, very much struck with the candour, the ingenuousness, the modesty, and, I must add, the humility of the writers, and with that singular and perpetual neglect of themselves, which never allows them to intermingle their own reflections, nor even the least eulogium in recounting the actions of their Master.

When I see these writers narrating with so much simplicity and coolness, the most weighty matters, and never attempting to astonish, but always to enlighten and convince, I must acknowledge, that their sole end is to attest to mankind a truth,  
which

which they judge to be of the highest importance to their happiness.

As they appear to me entirely occupied with this truth, and inattentive to their own personal concerns, it does not surprize me, that they should look to it alone ; that their only wishes are to exhibit it to view, and that they never think of giving it embellishments. With the utmost simplicity therefore do they say, *The leper stretched out his hand, and it was restored whole. The sick man took up his bed, and walked.*

This book exhibits the true sublime : for when it speaks of GOD, nothing can be more truly so, than *He wills, and the thing is done.* But I can easily judge, that this sublimity is found  
in

in it, for this reason only, that the thing itself is of an *extraordinary* nature, and that the writers represented it just as they saw it, just as it was, and have not mixed with it any other matter.

These writers appear not only to possess the most perfect ingenuoufness, and even to make no attempts to dissemble their own faults, but, what is most surprizing, they have not dissembled certain circumstances of the life and sufferings of their *Master*, which, in the eyes of the world, do not tend to elevate his glory. If they had suppressed them, they would most assuredly have been beyond the reach of discovery, and their adversaries could not have drawn any advantage from them.

They



They have not simply mentioned, but given them in full detail. I am therefore obliged to admit, that in their writings they proposed no other end, but to render testimony to the truth.

Was it possible, I frequently ask myself, that those fishermen, who performed greater things than their Master did, who said to the lame, *Rise and walk, and he walks*, should have had not the smallest particle of vanity, and disdained the applauses of the people, who were spectators of their prodigies?

With equal admiration and surprise, therefore, I read these words :  
“ Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye  
“ at this, and why look ye so ear-  
“ nestly

“neftly upon us, *as though by our*  
“own power and holinefs we had  
“made this man to walk?” Can I  
forget the humility, difinterestednefs  
and truth, expreffed in this charac-  
teriftical paffage? I have a heart  
made for feeling, and I confeß I am  
moved every time I read thefe  
words.

What are thefe men, therefore,  
who, when nature obeys their voice,  
are afraid that this obedience fhould  
be afcribed *to their own power and*  
*holinefs*? Can I reject fuch wit-  
neffes? Is it conceivable, that fuch  
things could have been invented?  
And how many other things do I  
discover, which are indiffolubly  
linked to thefe, and which do not  
naturally occur to the human mind!

## SECTION II.

PARTICULAR CHARACTER OF  
THE DEPOSITION.—HAS IT  
BEEN FORMALLY CONTRA-  
DICTED BY CONTEMPORARY  
DEPOSITIONS OF EQUAL FORCE?

I KNOW that several *parts* of the deposition appeared in a very short time after the events, attested by the witnesses. If these are the work of any impostor, he will undoubtedly take great care, not to be very circumstantial in his narrative, that he may not furnish the ready means of his own confusion. Nothing, however, can be more *circumstantial*, than this *deposition* now before me :  
in

in it I find the names of several persons, their quality, their offices, their places of abode, their maladies : I see places, times, circumstances, distinctly marked, and a hundred other minute details; all which concur in determining the *event* most precisely. In a word, I cannot doubt but that if I had lived in the place, and at the time in which the *deposition* was published, it would have been very easy for me to ascertain the truth of the *facts*. And this surely I should not have failed to do; would it have been neglected by the most obstinate and powerful enemies of the witnesses?

I search therefore in the history of the times, for *depositions* formally contradicting the deposition of the  
*witnesses,*



*witnesses*, and meet with nothing but vague accusations of imposture, of magic, or of superstition. Upon this, I put the question to myself, whether a circumstantial deposition can be destroyed by such vague and indefinite imputations?

But, perhaps, say I to myself, the depositions which formally contradicted that of the *witnesses*, are lost. Why was not the deposition of the witnesses also lost? Because it has been preserved as a most valuable treasure, by a numerous society which still subsists, and which has transmitted it to me. But I discover another society, equally numerous, and much more ancient, which being descended, by uninterrupted succession, from the first adversaries  
of

of the *witnesses*, and inheriting their hatred and prejudices against Christianity, could have as easily preserved those counter depositions, as the many other monuments, which at this day it produces with so much complacency, though many of them tend to betray and confound it.

Besides, I perceive very strong reasons, which must have engaged this society to preserve with the utmost care all the writings in opposition to those of the *witnesses*; I have particularly in my eye that most weighty and most odious accusation, which the *witnesses* had so uniformly, so repeatedly, and with such unparalleled courage, dared to charge upon the magistrates of this society,

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and

and the astonishing success of the testimony given to the *facts* upon which they grounded their accusation. How easily could magistrates, who had in their hands the management of the police, have judicially contradicted this testimony! How much were they interested to do so! What might not have been the effect of a judicial and circumstantial deposition, bearing on every page a refutation of that of the witnesses?

Since, therefore, the *society*, of which I am speaking, cannot produce in its own favour a *deposition* of this sort, I am justly authorized to think, that it never could advance any valid objection against the *witnesses*.

It

It comes strongly into my mind, that the friends of the witnesses, after they became powerful, might have destroyed the writings adverse to their cause. But they have not been able to destroy this great *society*, their declared enemy; and they did not become powerful till many ages after the *event*, which was the principal object of the *testimony*. I am, therefore, obliged to abandon a supposition, which appears to be destitute of foundation.

While the *Jewish society* confines itself to the most vague accusations of imposture, I see the *witnesses* insert in their writings, *examinations* before the magistrates and principal doctors of the society, and *interrogations* put by them: which prove, at least, that

C 2

they



they were not indifferent to what passed in their capital.

I cannot presume there was any such indifference ; the improbability of the thing is too great. I presume, on the contrary, that those magistrates or doctors did not neglect to inform themselves of the facts. I, therefore, scrutinize the *examinations* and *interrogations*, contained in the *writings* of the *witnesses*, or of their first adherents. And as these *writings* have not been formally contradicted by men, who had the greatest reason to do so, I cannot, I think, deny that they are of great force.

I always taste a new pleasure, when I peruse those interesting *interrogations* ;

*terrogations*; the more I peruse them, the more I admire the exquisite judgment, the singular precision, the noble courage and candour, which shine forth in the *answers*. Here the truth appears to issue from all sides, and a reading is sufficient to convince any man, that such *facts* could not have been forged. If they are an invention, where are there such inventions?

## SECTION III.

THE MAN LAME FROM HIS  
BIRTH.

THE witnesses scarcely commence their attestation of what they call the *truth*, when I see them brought before the tribunals of the capital. They are examined and interrogated, and boldly attest, before those tribunals, the same things which they had attested before the people.

A man lame from his birth receives a cure. Two of the *witnesses* are considered as the authors of this cure. The senators summon them, and put this question to them, “ *By what power, or by what name,*  
“ have

“ have ye done this ? ” The question is precise, and in form. “ *Ye rulers of the people,* ” answer the witnesses, “ if we this day be examined of the “ good deed done to the impotent “ man, by what means he is made “ whole, be it known unto you all, “ and to all the people, that by the “ name of *Jesus Christ of Nazareth,* “ whom ye crucified, whom God “ raised from the dead, by him doth “ this man stand here before you “ whole.”

What ! do the two fishermen make no attempts to conciliate the favour of their judges ? They begin by openly reproaching them with an atrocious crime, and conclude with affirming the most shocking fact, in the eyes of those judges !



Now if he who was crucified by the magistrates was justly put to death, if he is not risen again, if the miracle wrought upon the blind man be another fraud; these magistrates, who undoubtedly possess proofs of all this, will loudly and publicly reproach the two *witnesses* with their effrontery, their imposture, and wicked contrivance, and punish them with the utmost rigour.

I continue to read the narrative. When the rulers of the people saw the boldness of the two disciples, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with him that was crucified: and beholding the man who was healed  
standing

standing with them, they could say nothing against it. And when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves. “ And when “ they had conferred, they called “ them, and commanded them not “ to speak at all, nor teach in the “ name of the crucified Jesus ”

What do I behold ! Those magistrates, so deeply prejudiced against the *witnesses*, and their declared enemies, cannot confound them ! Those magistrates, to whom two of the witnesses have spoken with so much boldness, and so little caution, confine themselves to *threats* and *forbidding them to teach* ! Has the lame man then been healed ? But in the name of the *crucified* he was healed.

Has he then risen again? Do the magistrates then tacitly acknowledge this *resurrection*? Their conduct appears to me to demonstrate, at least, that they could not prove the contrary.

I cannot reasonably suppose, that the historian of the fishermen has fabricated this whole procedure; because it does not belong to me, who am removed, more than seventeen centuries, from that historian, to form against him an accusation, which ought to have been brought forward by his contemporaries, particularly by the countrymen of the witnesses; and because this has never been brought forward, or has at least never been proved.

I learn

I learn from this writer, that *five thousand persons* were converted at the sight of the *miracle*. I shall not say, that these are five thousand witnesses; I have not their depositions; but I will say, that so considerable a number of converts is at least a proof of the *notoriety* of the *fact*. I shall not pretend to say, that this number is exaggerated; because I have no valid authority to oppose against the writer, and my simple *negative* would be no authority against his express *affirmative*.

I cannot resist dwelling a little upon some expressions of this interesting narrative.

*Such as I have, give I thee: in the name of the Lord, rise up and walk!*

*Such*



*Such as I have, give I thee:* he has nothing but the power to make a lame man walk, and this power resides in a poor fisherman. *In the name of the Lord, rise up and walk!* How precise! How sublime! How worthy the majesty of Him who commandeth nature!

*If we be examined for the good deed done to the impotent man; it is an act of mercy, not of ostentation. They did not make signs appear in the heavens: they did a good deed to an impotent man: good indeed! and in the simplicity of an honest and virtuous heart.*

*Whom ye crucified, and whom God raised from the dead. No salvo, no palliative, no consideration, no personal*

sonal fears; are they therefore very sure of their fact, and under no apprehensions of being confounded? When speaking to the people, they had said, *We wot that through ignorance ye did it*: they do not say so before the tribunal. They were apparently afraid of having the air of flattering their judges, and desiring to obtain their favour. *Whom ye crucified, and whom God raised from the dead.*

## SECTION IV.

ST. PAUL.

I Continue to turn over the historian of the witnesses, and quickly meet with the history of a young man, who excites my curiosity very much.

Though educated at the foot of a sage, he does not glory in imitating his moderation. His lively, ardent, courageous character, his persecuting spirit, his blind attachment to the sanguinary maxims of a domineering sect, make him passionately desirous of distinguishing himself in the open war which that sect declares

clares against the *witnesses*. He accordingly consents to the violent death of one of the witnesses, and assists at the execution. But his impetuous fanatical zeal being insatiable, and not to be confined within the circle of the capital, he goes to his superiors, and demands letters from them, authorizing him to persecute the adherents of the new opinion in strange cities.

He sets out, accompanied by several attendants; *he breathes threatenings and slaughter*; and yet arrives not at the place of his destination, before he himself becomes a minister of Jesus Christ. That city, whither he was going, to vent his rage against the infant society, is the very place in which he commences his  
public



public ministry, and his attestation of the *facts* attested by the *witnesses* of the truth of Christianity.

The *moral* world has its *laws* as well as the *physical*: men do not throw off their characters all at once, and without a cause, they do not, all at once; and without a cause, renounce their most deeply rooted, their dearest, and, in their own eyes, most lawful prejudices, and much less the prejudices of birth, of education, and of religion in particular.

What then has happened upon the road to this furious persecutor, to render him all at once the zealous disciple of Him whom he persecuted? For I must necessarily suppose

pose a cause, and a great cause too, for so sudden and extraordinary a change. His historian, and he himself, inform me of this cause: a light from heaven shone around him: its brightness deprived him of sight: he fell to the ground, and heard the voice of the Messenger addressing him.

In a very short time, he becomes the object of the fury of that sect which he has abandoned: he is dragged to prisons; brought before the tribunals of his own nation, and before those of strangers; and everywhere attests, with equal firmness and constancy, the *facts* deposed by the first *witnesses*.

I take

I take pleasure, in particular, to follow him before a strange tribunal, where a king of his own nation happened to be present. There I hear him recount, in minute detail, the history of his conversion: he does not dissemble his former fury; nay, he paints it in the strongest colours: *When they were put to death, says he, I gave my voice against them: I oft compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.* He then proceeds to the extraordinary circumstances of his conversion, relates what followed it, attests the resurrection of Jesus, and concludes with an address to his judge: *The king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded, that none of these things are*  
*hidden*

*hidden from him ; for this thing was not done in a corner.*

Is the new *witness*, therefore, not more afraid, than the first were, of being contradicted? because he speaks of *things which were not done in a corner*. And I am not much surprized to see that this discourse staggers the prince: *Almost thou persuadest me*. Does the prince then believe him to be an *impostor*?

This *witness* had advanced the same things in the capital, when speaking to a numerous assembly of the people, and was not interrupted until he had shocked an ancient and favourite prejudice of this proud nation, respecting the calling of the *Gentiles*.

In



In the historian before me, I find other *judicial proceedings* very circumstantially related, of which the new disciple was the object, and which were raised at the instance of some of his countrymen, who had sworn his destruction. I carefully examine these proceedings, and the more I prosecute the examination, the more do I feel the *probability* increase in favour of the *facts* attested by the *witnesses*.

I find likewise, in the same historian, other discourses of this *witnesses*, which appear to me master-pieces of reasoning and eloquence, if the hackneyed word *eloquence* can be applied to such discourses. I dare not therefore add, that there are some of them full of spirit: this word  
would

would be still less applicable to so great a man, and to so great things.

“ Men of Athens, I perceive that

“ in all things you are too super-

“ stitious: for as I passed by, and

“ beheld the objects of your wor-

“ ship, I found an altar with this

“ inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN

“ GOD. Whom, therefore, you

“ ignorantly worship, him declare

“ I unto you.” In these discourses

there is something so pathetic,

that I cannot resist the impression

they make upon me. “ Bonds and

“ afflictions abide me: but none of

“ these things move me; neither

“ count I my life dear unto myself,

“ so that I might finish my course

“ with joy, and the ministry which

“ I have received of the Lord. . . .

“ I know that none of you . . . shall

“ see

“ see my face any more. . . . I have  
“ coveted no man’s silver, or gold,  
“ or apparel; and you yourselves  
“ know, that these hands have mi-  
“ nistered to my necessities, and to  
“ them that were with me. I have  
“ shewn you all things, how that,  
“ so labouring, you ought to sup-  
“ port the weak, and to remember  
“ the words of the Lord, that it  
“ is more blessed to give, than to  
“ receive. My face — These  
“ hands—.”

I am astonished at the number,  
the kind, the greatness, and the du-  
ration of the labours and trials of  
this extraordinary personage : and  
if glory is to be measured by im-  
portance of design, nobleness of  
motives, and obstacles to be sur-  
mounted,

mounted, he must be considered as a true hero.

But this hero has himself written : I study his productions, and am struck with the extreme disinterestedness, the gentleness, the singular unction, and above all the sublime benevolence, which shine in all his writings. The whole human race *is not straitened in his heart*. There is no branch of morality, which does not vegetate and bring forth fruit with him. He is himself a Morality which lives and breathes, and is incessantly in action. He gives at once example and precept : and what precepts !

“ Let your charity be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is  
“ evil,



“ evil, cleave to that which is good.  
“ Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love ; in honour preferring one another ; not slothful in business ; distributing to the necessitous ; given to hospitality. Bless them who persecute you. Bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one towards another. Mind not high things, but be condescending. Be not wise in your own conceits.”

How could a morality so exalted, so pure, and so well adapted to the wants of universal society, be dictated by the very man *who breathed threatenings and slaughter*, and who placed

placed his delight and glory in torturing his fellow-men? But, above all, how has such a man come all at once to *practise* a morality so perfect? Has HE, then, who came to recal men to those grand maxims, *spoken* to him?

What shall I say also of that admirable picture of *charity*, so full of warmth and life, exhibited in another work of this extraordinary moralist, and which I am never wearied of contemplating? It is, however, not the picture itself which so much commands my attention, as the occasion which produced it. Of all the gifts which men can obtain or exercise, there is, beyond all contradiction, none more calculated

D

to

to flatter their vanity than miraculous gifts. Mean and illiterate men, who all at once are enabled to speak foreign languages, are very much tempted to make a parade of so extraordinary a gift, and to forget its *end*.

Accordingly, by a numerous society of new converts, founded by this illustrious man, this gift is very soon abused: he delays not to write to them, and in the strongest terms to recal them to the true employment of *miracles*: he hesitates not highly to prefer before all *miraculous* gifts, that sublime benevolence, which he calls *charity*, and which, according to him, is the most perfect assemblage of all the social virtues.

tues. “ Though I speak with the  
“ tongues of men and angels, and  
“ have not charity, I am become as  
“ sounding brags, or a tinkling cym-  
“ bal. And though I have the gift  
“ of prophecy, and understand all  
“ mysteries and all knowledge ; and  
“ though I have all faith, so that I  
“ could remove mountains, and  
“ have not charity, I am nothing.”

How has this sage learned to make so just an estimate of things ? How is he not dazzled with the eminent gifts he possesses, or at least believes he possesses ? Would an impostor use them in this manner ? Who discovered to him that *miracles* are only simple *signs to them who do not yet believe* ? Who taught this fana-



tical persecutor to prefer the love of mankind to the most brilliant gifts? In the precepts and virtues of the disciple, can I fail to perceive the efficacious voice of that Master, who sacrificed himself for the human race?

## SECTION V.

## THE MAN BORN BLIND.

THE deposition of the *witnesses* contain frequent *interrogatories*, which very much excite my attention. In these must I chiefly search for the sources of the *probability* of the *facts* attested. If, as I have remarked, these interrogatories have never been formally contradicted by those who had the greatest interest to do so, I cannot reasonably refuse the consequences which naturally follow.

Among these interrogatories, there is one in particular which I never

read without a secret pleasure ; that respecting a man born blind, who was cured by the Messenger. This miracle greatly astonishes all who had known the blind man ; it occupies their whole thoughts and conversations. They bring him before the Doctors : the Doctors interrogate him, and demand *how he had received his sight ? He put clay upon mine eyes,* replied he, *and I washed, and do see.*

The Doctors are not disposed to believe the *fact*. They doubt, and are divided. They wish to satisfy their doubts ; and suspecting that the man *had not been blind, they call his parents,* and ask them, *Is this your son, whom you say was born blind ? How then doth he now see ?*

The

The parents answer, "We know  
" that this is our son, and that he  
" was born blind; but by what  
" means he now seeth, we know  
" not: he is of age, ask him: he  
" will speak for himself."

The Doctors a second time interrogate the man that was blind:  
" Give God the praise," say they,  
" we know that he, who thou sayest  
" opened thine eyes, is a finner."  
" Whether he be a finner," replies  
he, " I know not: one thing I know,  
" that whereas I was blind, now I  
" see."

Upon this ingenuous answer, the  
Doctors recur to their first question,  
" What did he to thee? how open-  
" ed he thine eyes?" " I have told



“ you already,” replies the man, equally firm as ingenuous; “ where-  
“ fore would you hear it again?  
“ Will you also be his disciples?”

At this reply the Doctors are irritated: they revile him. “ We know  
“ not,” say they, “ from whence he  
“ is, of whom thou speakest.” “ *Why,*  
“ *herein is a marvellous thing, that ye*  
“ *know not from whence he is,*” boldly replies this man of candour and good sense, “ *and yet he has opened*  
“ *mine eyes,*” &c.

How simple! how natural! how precise! how interesting! how coherent! If the truth be not told here, by what characters, shall I be able to discover it?

## SECTION VI.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE  
FOUNDER.

**B**UT of all the *judicial proceedings* contained in the *deposition* of the witnesses, there is unquestionably none more important, than that which immediately concerns the person of the Messenger himself. It is also the most circumstantial, the ofteneft repeated, and that to which all the witnesses make the most direct and most frequent allusions. Here their testimony always centres. I meet with it in all the principal parts of the *deposition*; and when I compare them with one another, upon this

essential point, they appear very *harmonious*.

The Messenger is seized, examined, and interrogated by the magistrates of his own nation: they charge him to declare who he is: he does so: his answer is called *blasphemy*: false witnesses are brought against him, and they equivocate: he is condemned, and delivered over to a superior and foreign tribunal: there he is again interrogated: he gives nearly the same answers; the judge, convinced of his innocence, is desirous of releasing him; the magistrates, who condemned him, persist in demanding his death: they intimidate the superior judge, who abandons him to their fury: he is crucified, and buried: the magistrates seal

seal up the sepulchre: they place their own guards upon it, and in a very short time after, the witnesses attest in the capital, and before those very magistrates, *that he who was crucified is risen again.*

These are the most essential facts: I compare them together, and analyze them; and discover only two hypotheses which can satisfactorily account for the *final event.*

Either the witnesses have carried away the body, or the Messenger is really risen again. I must decide between these two hypotheses, for I cannot discover a third.

In the first place, I consider the particular opinions, the prejudices,  
the



the character of the witnesses; I observe their conduct, their circumstances, the situation of their spirits and of their hearts, before and after the death of their *Master*.

In the second place, I examine the prejudices, character, conduct, and allegations of their adversaries.

The country of the witnesses is sufficient to point out their opinions and prejudices in the general. I know that their nation professes to expect a temporal deliverer, and that he is the dearest object of their wishes and hopes. The witnesses, therefore, also expect this deliverer; and I find in their *writings*, many circumstances which confirm me in this opinion, and prove that they  
were

were persuaded, that He whom they call their Master was to be this *temporal* deliverer. In vain does this Master endeavour to spiritualize their ideas: they do not divest themselves of the *national* prejudice, by which they are so strongly possessed. *We trusted that it had been he who should have redeemed our nation.*

These men, whose ideas rise not above sensible things, have a simplicity and timidity, which they themselves do not conceal. Every moment they mistake the meaning of their Master's discourses; and when he is seized, they fly. The most zealous amongst them, thrice, and even with imprecations, denies that he ever knew him; and I see this shameful cowardice minutely describ-

described in the four principal *depositions*.

I cannot doubt for one moment, but that they were thoroughly persuaded of the reality of the miracles wrought by their *Master*, for their *senses* alone were sufficient to ascertain that a paralytic walks; that a man formerly blind, now sees; that a dead man rises again. Neither can I doubt, that they were attached to this Master by a train of ideas, which they had formed to themselves respecting the *end* of his mission. The attachments of men have always a foundation; and the men of whom I speak, must have hoped for something from him, to whose fate they had linked their own.

*They*

*They hoped*, then, at least, that he would have redeemed their nation from a foreign yoke: but that Master, from whom they expected this great deliverance, is betrayed, delivered up, abandoned, condemned, crucified and buried, and with him all their temporal hopes vanish.—  
*He who had saved others, could not save himself*: his enemies triumph, his friends are humbled, astonished, and confounded.

In such desperate circumstances, will the witnesses conceive the extravagant project of carrying away the body of their Master? Shall I easily persuade myself, that such a project could have entered into the heads of people so simple, so unpolished, so timid, so devoid of intrigue?



trigue? What! will those <sup>very</sup> men, who have but now abandoned their Master in so cowardly a manner, form all at once the strange resolution of carrying away his body, in opposition to the secular arm! Will they openly expose themselves to the greatest dangers! Will they brave a certain and cruel death! And with what views?

Either they are persuaded that their Master *will rise again*, or they are not: if they are, it is evident, that they will resign his body to the Divine Power; if they are not, all their *temporal* hopes must be annihilated. What then could they propose to themselves by carrying away the body, by publishing that he had risen again? But will men of this  
com.

complexion, men without credit, without fortune, without authority, ever hope to procure any belief to so monstrous an imposture?

The exploit perhaps was easily effected: but the sepulchre is sealed; guards surround it; and those guards have been chosen, and placed there, by the very men who had the greatest interest to prevent the imposture. How well suited were such precautions to drive from the minds of timid fishermen every idea of carrying away the body! Will men, who have neither silver nor gold, undertake to corrupt those guards? Will men, hated and despised by the government, find any hardy enough to lend them assistance? Will they flatter

ter themselves, that their assistants will not betray them?

But am I certain, that the sepulchre was sealed, and that guards were placed upon it? I observe that this important, decisive *circumstance*, is to be found only in the *deposition* of *Matthew*, and I am a little astonished at this. I carefully enquire, therefore, whether this essential circumstance of the narrative was contradicted by those who were most directly concerned to do so, and I am satisfied it never has been contradicted. I must therefore admit, that the relation of the *witness* remains in full force; and that the mere silence of the other authors of the *written deposition*, cannot in the least

least degree invalidate his testimony on this point.

Independently of a testimony so express, how improbable is it in itself, that magistrates, who have great reason to dread an imposture, and who have in their hands the means to prevent it, will neglect to make use of those means! And if they have not made use of them, what reasons can I assign for their conduct?

It will appear still more probable, that those magistrates have taken all the necessary precautions, if I have proofs that they previously thought of the means of opposing the imposture. “ Sir! we remember that  
“ that deceiver said, while he was  
“ yet alive, After three days I shall  
“ rise



“ rise again. Command, therefore,  
“ that the sepulchre be made sure  
“ until the third day, lest his dis-  
“ ciples come by night, and steal  
“ away the body, and say unto the  
“ people he is risen from the dead.  
“ So the last error will be worse  
“ than the first.”

If, therefore, the rulers of the people have taken the necessary precautions, have they not removed from themselves every possibility of supposing that the body could be carried away? They have the confidence, however, to suppose it: *they give large money to the soldiers, who at their instigation spread it among the people, That the disciples came by night, and stole away the body, while they slept.*

I do

I do not insist upon the singular absurdity of this report, suggested by the guards. It is glaring: how could those guards depose to what passed *while they slept*? Besides, is it very probable, that trusty guards, chosen expressly for the purpose of preventing the most dangerous imposture, would allow themselves to sleep?

I shall here propose an argument, which strikes me very much: nothing appears to me more evident, than that the magistrates could not be ignorant of the truth. If they are convinced, that the body is really carried away, why do they not prosecute their guards? Why do they not publish this *prosecution*? What could be more obvious, or better

better calculated to stop the progress of the imposture, and to confound the impostors?

These magistrates, though so deeply interested to confound the imposture, do not pursue a method so direct, so clear, and so judicial. They do not even secure the persons of the impostors. They do not confront them with the guards. They punish neither the impostors nor the guards. They publish no legal proceeding. They do not satisfy the public. Neither do their descendants give more information, but confine themselves, as their fathers had done, to the simple affirmation of imposture.

But, what is more; when these very magistrates, in a short time  
after

after, summon before them two of the principal disciples, upon occasion of a cure which makes a noise, and when those disciples dare accuse them to their faces of a great crime, and attest in their presence the resurrection of him, *whom they crucified*; what do the magistrates do? They satisfy themselves with *threatening the two disciples, and forbidding them to teach*. Those menaces do not intimidate the *witnesses*; they continue to proclaim aloud in the same place, and under the very eye of the police, the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. They are again summoned before the magistrates; they appear, and with the same boldness persist in their deposition: *The God of our fathers raised up him whom ye slew.—We are his witnesses*. What do the magistrates now? *They*  
beat



*beat the witnesses, repeat their first prohibition, and let them go.*

Here are circumstantial facts; facts which have never been contradicted: facts constantly and unanimously attested by *witnesses*, who, I must acknowledge, do possess all the qualities which constitute the best foundation for the *credibility* of *testimony*. Shall I, to invalidate such facts, say, that the *fear of the people* prevented the magistrates from making *enquiries*, from judicially prosecuting and punishing the *witnesses* as *impostors*, from publishing authentic, *legal proceedings*, &c.? But if Jesus Christ, during his life-time, had done nothing to excite the admiration and veneration of the people: if he had wrought no miracle: if the people  
*had*

*had not blessed God for having given to men such power: if the doctrine of Christ, and his manner of teaching, had not far excelled every thing they had heard from their own Doctors: if they had not been convinced that never man spake like him: why should the magistrates have had any thing to fear from this people, by judicially prosecuting an impostor's abject disciples, who were themselves also impostors? How should the magistrates have had any thing to fear from a people so strongly, and for so long a time, prejudiced in their favour, if they could have proved, by legal public proceedings, that the cure of the man born blind, the resurrection of Lazarus, the cure of the lame man, the gift of tongues, &c. were only shew tricks? How easily*

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might

might they have taken informations upon such facts ! How easily in particular could they have proved most rigorously, that the witnesses spoke only their mother tongue ! What reason had the magistrates to *fear the people*, if they could have *judicially* demonstrated, that the disciples had carried away the body of their Master ? And was it more difficult to prove this than the rest ?

Can I now have any doubt of the extreme improbability of the first *hypothesis*, that the body *was carried away* ? Can I *reasonably* refuse to admit, that the second *hypothesis* has at least a degree of probability equal to that of any fact whatsoever, in the history of the same age, or of the ages immediately following ?

Shall

Shall I here delineate the frightful picture of the character of the principal adversaries? Shall I draw this picture from their own historian Josephus? Shall I set this character in opposition to that of the witnesses? Vice to virtue; fury to moderation; hypocrisy to sincerity; falsehood to truth? I should forget that I am making only a *sketch*, and not a *treatise*.

The *resurrection* of the Messenger is not an *unconnected* fact, but is the chief link of a chain of facts of the same sort, and of a multitude of facts of every sort, all of which would be absolutely inexplicable, if the first were supposed to be *false*? If, in any matter whatever, an *hypothesis* be so much the more *probable*,



as it the more happily explains a greater number of facts, or a greater number of essential *particulars* of a fact; shall I not in sound argument be obliged to grant, that the first *hypothesis* explains nothing, and that the second explains every thing most happily and most naturally?

Shall I add, that if the Messenger be not *risen*, he has been a most extraordinary impostor? for by the confession of the *witnesses*, he had predicted his own *death* and *resurrection*, and established a *memorial* of both. If he is not risen, therefore, his disciples must have thought that he had deceived them in this most important point; and if they thought so, how could they have founded upon a resurrection, which  
did

did not take place, such exalted hopes of *future happiness*? In his name, how could they have announced to the human race this future happiness? How could they have exposed themselves, for so long a period, to so many contradictions, to such cruel trials, to death itself, in support of a *doctrine*, which entirely rested on a *false* fact, and the falsity of which was so manifestly known to them? How could men, who made so public, so constant, and apparently so sincere a profession of the most delicate and noble love towards mankind, have been so unnatural as to deceive many thousands of their fellow-men, and precipitate them along with themselves into an abyss of misery? How could extraordinary impostors have hoped to be

rewarded, in another life, for the sufferings they endured in this? How could such impostors teach men the most pure, the most sublime doctrine, and that best suited to the wants of universal society?—But I have already insisted long enough upon these monstrous contradictions to common sense: here they present themselves in so great numbers, and are so striking, that I need only reflect upon them a few moments, to be sensible on which side the greatest *probability* lies.

Shall I object, that the *resurrection* of the Messenger was not sufficiently *public*, and that he ought to have shewn himself in the capital, after his resurrection, and especially to his judges? I shall at first sight perceive,

ceive, that the question does not at all respect the knowledge of what God could have done, but of that solely which he has done. God would speak to man as an *intelligent* and *moral* being; he would not *force* him to believe, and thus leave his understanding unexercised. I have, therefore, only to satisfy myself, that the resurrection of the Messenger was accompanied with circumstances sufficiently decisive, and was preceded and followed by *facts* sufficiently striking to convince a *rational* man, of the *extraordinary* mission of the Messenger. Now when I examine all the circumstances and facts; when I weigh them in the balance of reason, I cannot deny that God has done all that was *sufficient* to give a reasonable man that



*moral certainty*, respecting his future existence, which he wanted, which he desired with so much ardour, and which was so well suited to his *present* condition.

I acknowledge, likewise, that my objection to the defect of *notoriety* in the resurrection of the Messenger, would involve in it a great absurdity; because, when I investigate this objection, I shall very quickly perceive, that every individual of the human race might also require that the Messenger should appear to him, &c.

I must not say, this or that is wise, therefore God has done, or ought to have done it; but, I ought to say, God has done it, therefore it is wise.

Does

Does it become a being so profoundly ignorant, to pronounce upon the *ways* of Wisdom itself? The only thing here proportioned to my limited faculties, is, to study the ways of *Adorable Wisdom*, and to be sensible of the value of his kindness.

## SECTION VII.

APPARENT CONTRARIETIES IN  
THE DEPOSITION.

AT first sight, all the parts of the *deposition* appeared to me very *harmonious*, or *convergent*. Nevertheless, I discover in them many varieties, both in the *form*, and *matter*. In these I perceive, at least apparent *contrarieties*. I see difficulties respecting certain points of genealogy, certain places, certain persons, &c. and I do not immediately find the solution of these difficulties.

As

As I have no *secret* interest to believe those difficulties *insolvable*, I do not begin by imagining they are so. I have studied the *logic* of the heart and of the head; and am not entirely ignorant of *criticism*. I collect the *parallel* passages: I compare them together: I examine them minutely, and borrow the aid of the best interpreters. I see, that the difficulties very quickly diminish, that the light every moment increases, expands by degrees, reflects from every side, and illuminates the most obscure parts of the object.

If, notwithstanding, there should be corners which the light has not brightened to my wish; if there remain shades which I cannot dispel,  
it



it does not therefore come into my head, and far less into my heart, to draw consequences against the *whole* of the *deposition*: because those thin shades do not overpower the light, which the prominent parts of the picture so strongly reflect.

I am, indeed, at liberty to *doubt*; the *philosophical* doubt is the very road to truth; but I am not at liberty to fail in honesty, because *true* philosophy is absolutely incompatible with dishonesty, and because the philosophy of the heart is superior to that of the head. If, in the critical examination of any author whatsoever, I am always to conduct myself by the most sure and common rules of interpretation; if one  
of

of those *rules* directs me to form my judgment upon the *whole* of the circumstances; if another teaches me, that slight difficulties can never invalidate that *whole*, when in other respects it bears the most essential characters of *truth*, or at least of *probability*: why should I refuse to apply those rules to the examination of the present *deposition*, and why should not I judge of this *deposition* by its *whole*?

Do not those apparent *contrarieties*, those oppositions as to certain *names*, those difficulties of various kinds, indicate most clearly, that the authors of the different *parts* of the *deposition* have not copied from one another, and that each of them has  
re-

related what he knew from the *testimony* of his *own senses*, or had heard from *eye-witnesses*?

If the different *parts* of the *deposition* had borne a great *resemblance* to one another, not in the *form* only, but in the *matter*, should I not have had cause to suspect, that they had all come from the same hand, or that they had been transcribed from each other? and would not this *suspicion*, which is both just and natural, have greatly weakened the *validity* of the *deposition*?

Am I not much better satisfied, when I see one of those authors thus begin his narration? “Forasmuch  
“as many have taken in hand to set  
“forth

“ forth in order a declaration of  
“ those things which are most surely /  
“ believed among us ; even as they  
“ delivered them to us, who from  
“ the beginning were eye-witnesses  
“ and ministers of the word : it  
“ seemed good to me also, having  
“ had perfect understanding of all  
“ things from the very first, to write  
“ unto thee, in order that thou  
“ mightest know the certainty of  
“ those things wherein thou hast  
“ been instructed.” Do I not feel  
my satisfaction increase, when I read  
in the principal composition of one  
of the first witnesses, “ He that saw,  
“ bare record, and his record is true ;  
“ and he knoweth that he saith true,  
“ that ye might believe ?” Or when  
I read in another composition of the  
same witness, “ That which we have  
“ heard



“ heard, which we have seen with  
“ our eyes, which we have looked  
“ upon, and our hands have handled  
“ of the word of life, declare we un-  
“ to you.”

## SECTION VIII.

## AUTHENTICITY OF THE WRITTEN DEPOSITION.

HOW can I be assured of the *authenticity* of the most important parts of the *deposition* ?

I perceive, at first sight, that I must not confound the *authenticity* of the deposition with its *truth*. I, therefore, fix the meaning of the terms, that I may avoid all equivocation.

By the *authenticity* of any *part* of the deposition, I mean, that degree of  
of

of *certainty* which convinces me, that that *part* was indeed written by the *author* whose *name* it bears.

The *truth* of the *deposition* will be its *conformity* with the *facts*.

From this distinction, therefore, I understand, that *historical truth* does not depend upon the *authenticity* of the history : for I easily conceive, that a book may be very *conformable* to *facts*, and yet bear a *fictionitious name*, or no name at all.

But if I am certain of the *authenticity* of the history, and if I know the historian to be a man of veracity, the authenticity of the history will persuade me of its *truth*, or render it at least very probable.

The

The book which I am examining did not fall from heaven : like all other books, it was written by men. I can *judge*, therefore, of the *authenticity* of this book, in the same manner as I do of the authenticity of all other books.

How do I know that the histories of Thucydides, of Polybius, of Tacitus, &c. are indeed the *productions* of those *authors*, whose *names* they bear? *Tradition* informs me of this. I ascend from century to century ; I consult the *monuments* of different ages : I compare them with the histories themselves ; and the general result of my enquiries is, that those *histories* have been constantly ascribed to the *authors* whose names they bear at this day.

I can-



I cannot reasonably suspect the fidelity of this tradition : it is too ancient, too constant, too uniform, and has never been confuted.

I pursue, therefore, the same method in my enquiries into the *authenticity* of the *deposition* in question, and arrive at the same general and essential *result*.

But because the history of Peloponnesus was much less interesting to the Greeks, than the history of the Messenger was to his first followers, I cannot doubt, but that these have bestowed much more attention in ascertaining the *authenticity* of this history, than the Greeks did, in ascertaining the authenticity of that of Thucydides.

Would

Would a *society*, strongly persuaded that the book of which I am speaking, contained the assurances of an eternal happiness ; would an afflicted, despised, persecuted *society*, which incessantly drew from this book those consolations and supports which its trials rendered so necessary ; would this *society*, I say, allow itself to be imposed upon, as to the *authenticity* of a deposition which became every day more precious ?

Could a *society*, among which the very authors of the *deposition* had lived ; which they themselves had governed for several years, be destitute of *means* to ascertain the *authenticity* of the writings of those authors ? Would it be perfectly indifferent about employing those  
*means* ?

*means?* Was it more difficult for this *society* to obtain conviction of the authenticity of its writings, than it is for any society whatever to ascertain the authenticity of a writing, ascribed to a person very well known to it, or who bears its name?

Could the *particular* and numerous societies to which the *first witnesses* addressed various *writings*, be mistaken as to the *authenticity* of such *writings*? Could they in the least degree doubt whether those *witnesses* had written to them; whether they had answered different questions which they had proposed to them; whether those *witnesses* had sojourned amongst them?

Tap-

I approach as nearly as possible to the first age of that great *society* founded by the *witnesses* : I consult the most ancient *monuments*, and discover, that almost at the birth of this *society*, its members disagreed about certain points of doctrine. I enquire into what passed at that time, among the parties at variance ; and I see that those, whom they call *heretics*, made their appeal, as well as the others, to the *deposition* of the first witnesses, and acknowledged its *authenticity*.

I discover, likewise, that the adversaries \* of all those parties, adversaries of learning and penetration, and who were removed but at

\* Celsus, Porphyry, Julian, &c.



a small distance from this first age, did not dispute the authenticity of the principal *parts* of the *deposition*.

I find this *deposition* frequently quoted by writers † of great weight, who bordered upon this first age, and professed to acknowledge its *authenticity*, as well as the validity of the *testimony* given, by the first *witnesses*, to the *miraculous* facts. I compare those *quotations* with the *deposition* in my hand, and I cannot pretend to deny their conformity.

Prosecuting my enquiries, I discover, that a short time after the birth of this society, a great number of *false depositions* were publish-

† The apostolical fathers, and their immediate successors.

ed, some of which were quoted by the most respectable Doctors of the society, as *being true*. From this I am at first led to infer, that it was not so difficult as I thought, to impose upon this society, and even upon its principal *conductors*. This excites my attention and distrust, and I closely investigate this delicate point.

If a writing may be *true*, without being *authentic*, the *false depositions* in question might be *true*, although they had not been *authentic*. Those contemporary Doctors, who quoted them, apparently knew whether they were conformable to the *essential facts*, and I am myself acquainted with valid proofs that they were so. They were, therefore, *inauthentic histories*,

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*tories*, rather than *false* histories, or *romances*.

I see, besides, that those Doctors rarely *quoted* the *inauthentic histories*, while they frequently *quoted* the *authentic*. I even discover, that some of those *inauthentic* histories were nothing but the authentic history either modified, or here and there interpolated.

I ought not to be astonished at the great number of those *inauthentic* histories, which were at that time published throughout the world; I ought rather to be astonished that there were not more of them. For I can easily conceive, that the zealous disciples of the *principal* witnesses, would most naturally com-  
mit

mit to writing what they had heard from their masters, and give their *narratives* a *title* resembling that of the *authentic parts*. Such *histories* might be very conformable to the *essential facts*; since the authors received them immediately from the mouths of the *first witnesses*, or at least of their first disciples.

I find that the *heretics* had also their *histories*, differing more or less from the *authentic history*: but it is no difficult matter for me to ascertain, that those histories, though forged with a malicious intention, contained the greater part of the *essential facts*, which had been attested by the *principal witnesses*. Those heretics appear to have been strongly exasperated against the opposite par-



ty, and since they have inserted in their *histories* the same *essential facts*, which that party professed to believe, I cannot but consider such conformity between parties so very opposite, as the strongest presumption in favour of the *authenticity* and truth of the *deposition* under review.

I observe, likewise, that the society, which was the faithful depositary of the doctrine and writings of the witnesses, did not fail to join its Doctors in declaiming against the heretics and their writings, and in constantly appealing to the authentic writings, as to the supreme and common judge of *all controversy*. And the history of this society informs me, that it was particularly careful to read its writings every  
week

week in its assemblies, and that they were precisely the same which are at this day exhibited as the *authentic* deposition of the *witnesses*.

I cannot reasonably suppose, therefore, that this society would allow itself to be easily deceived with respect to the *authenticity* of the numerous writings, published in its own bosom. If there remained any reasonable doubt upon this essential point, it would be dispelled by one remarkable fact, namely, that this *society* was so far from inconsiderately admitting writings as authentic which were not so, that for a long time it actually suspected the *authenticity* of different writings, which, after continued and mature examination, were acknowledged to have

proceeded from the hand of the witnesses.

This fact is supported by another still more remarkable : in the history of that period, I read, that the members of this society exposed themselves to the greatest tortures, rather than deliver up to their persecutors, those books which they regarded as authentic and sacred, and which those violent persecutors destined to the flames. Shall I presume, that the most zealous partisans of Grecian glory would have sacrificed themselves, to preserve the writings of a Thucydides, or of a Polybius ?

If, afterwards, I cast my eye upon the best *accounts* of the *manuscripts* of  
the

the *deposition*, I shall find, that the principal *parts* of this deposition bear, in those manuscripts, the *names* of the same authors, to whom this society had always ascribed them. This proof will appear so much the more convincing, the more probable it is, that some of those *manuscripts* lay claim to very high antiquity.

I have, therefore, in favour of the authenticity of this deposition, the most ancient, most constant, and most uniform testimony of the society with which it was deposited; and I have also the *testimony* of the most ancient *heretics*, that of the most ancient *adversaries*, and the authority of the most original *manuscripts*.



How should I rise up at this day against so many united testimonies, and those of so great weight? Am I more advantageously placed than the first *heretics*, or first *adversaries*, to contradict the invariable and unanimous *testimony* of the *primitive society*? Do I know any book of the same period, the *authenticity* of which is established upon proofs so solid, so singular, so striking, and of so many different kinds?

## SECTION IX.

HAS THE WRITTEN DEPOSITION  
BEEN ALTERED, OR FABRICAT-  
ED IN ITS ESSENTIAL PARTS?

I SHALL not insist much with myself upon the *possibility* of certain *alterations* of the authentic text: I shall not say, that this text could have been *corrupted*. I see at once how extremely improbable it is, that it could have been so, during the lives of the *authors*: their opposition and authority would have very soon confounded the *corrupters*.

It would appear to me equally improbable, that such corruptions

could have been executed with any success, immediately after the death of the authors: their instructions and writings were too recent, and too well known.

The improbability would appear to me to increase infinitely in the ages following; for it would evidently increase, in direct proportion to the prodigious number of *copies*, and that multitude of *versions* of the *authentic text*, which were incessantly made, and speedily conveyed to all parts of the known world. How could so many *copies*, and so many *versions*, be *corrupted* all at once? Nay, how could the very thought of doing so, enter into the head of any man?

Besides,

Besides, I know that the history of that time sufficiently proves, that the first *heretics* did not begin to write till after the death of the first *witnesses*. If those *heretics*, in order to favour their own particular opinions, had undertaken to *corrupt* the *writings* of the witnesses, or those of their more illustrious disciples, would not the numerous and vigilant society, the guardian of those writings, have immediately opposed them? And if this society, in order to refute the heretics with greater success, had itself dared to corrupt the authentic text, would those heretics, who also appealed to this text, have been silent upon such impostures?

All



All this will apply to the *fabrications*. It seems equally improbable, that *fabricated* writings could at any time be ascribed to the witnesses, as it does, that their own writings could be *corrupted*.

When I consider the matter more closely, I can easily perceive, that the continual and multiplied *divisions* of the society, founded by the *witnesses*, must naturally have preserved the *authentic* text in its primitive integrity.

If those divisions afterwards broke out into open and bloody wars; if the parties at war always appealed to the authentic text, as to the absolute arbitrator of their quarrels; if at length a new method be discovered  
of

of multiplying to infinity the copies of the authentic text, and with no less dispatch than accuracy; shall I not be under the most reasonable obligation to admit, that the credibility of the *written deposition* has lost nothing through the lapse of time; and that those writings, which are at this day presented to me as the genuine writings of the witnesses, are indeed the same which have always been ascribed to them?

## SECTION X.

## VARIATIONS IN THE DEPOSITIONS.

THE *printed deposition*, which I have in my hand, *represents*, therefore, the best *manuscripts* of this deposition, which have come down to my time ; and these manuscripts *represent* the most ancient and most *original manuscripts*, of which they are copies.

But how many alterations of different kinds might not those manuscripts have undergone, from the injuries of time, the revolutions of states and of societies, from the negligence,

gligence, inattention, and ignorance of transcribers! And how many other sources of *alteration* may be discovered! I must not dissemble: can I at this day flatter myself, that the *authentic* deposition of the *witnesses* has come down to me in its original purity, through the space of seventeen centuries, and after having passed through so many millions of hands, for the most part, weak and ignorant?

Having examined this important point of criticism, I am struck with the prodigious number of *variations*. I see an able critic \* has enumerated more than *thirty thousand*; and yet this critic flatters himself, that he has published the best *copy* of the *deposition* of the *witnesses*, and declares

\* Dr. Mill.



clares, that in executing the work, he accurately *collated* more than *ninety manuscripts*, collected from all quarters.

I can hardly overcome my astonishment; but such a state is not favourable for reflection: I must put no confidence in those first impressions, but enquire more attentively and coolly, into the sources of this prodigious number of *variations*.

Here reflections crowd upon my mind; I shall attend to the most essential. It is true, I know not any *ancient book*, which presents near so great a number of various *readings*, as that now under examination. Ought this, however, to surprize  
me

me much? Was there ever any book so much read, so often copied, translated, and commented upon, in so many places, and by so many readers, transcribers, translators, and interpreters, as this book? It would exhaust the application of the most laborious student to read and collate the numerous versions, which have been made of this book, into different languages, and from the earliest days of its publication. I have already asked, would not a book which contains the pledges of *eternal happiness*, appear to be the most important of all books, to that great *society*, to which it had been entrusted, which acknowledged its *authenticity* and *truth*, and which has transmitted this precious deposit from age to age?

I am

I am not, therefore, so much astonished, as I was, at those *thirty thousand variations*. It naturally happens, that as the copies of a book multiply, the *variations* in that book will be more numerous. And my astonishment is entirely dispelled, when turning again to the learned critic, I understand from himself, that the thirty thousand *variations* were collected, not from the *copies* of the *original* text only, but also from those of all the *versions*, &c.

I run over those *variations*, and my own eyes convince me, that they do not affect any thing *essential*, neither the *foundation* nor *totality* of the *deposition*. Here I find one word substituted for another: there one or more words transposed or omitted:

ted: in another place, some more remarkable words, which appear to have passed from the *margin* into the *text*, and which I do not observe in the most original *manuscripts*.

If, notwithstanding the great number of *variations* in the writings of Cicero, Horace, or Virgil, the most severe critics think they are in possession of the *authentic* text of those authors; why should not I believe, that I also am in possession of the *authentic* text of the *deposition*? If the *variations* of this deposition were a sufficient reason for my rejection of it, must I not in like manner reject all the books of antiquity? If I reason justly on this subject, I must conform to the rules of sound criticism, and not pretend to judge of  
the



the book in question, otherwise than  
I do of every other book.

But ought not a book designed by  
Divine Wisdom to enlighten human  
reason, and to give mankind the  
most positive assurances of a future  
state of happiness, to have been pre-  
served by that Wisdom from every  
species of *alteration*? And if it had  
been so preserved, would not this  
have been the most demonstrative  
proof, that God himself had *spoken*  
by his Messenger.

I listen to the objections without  
reserve: truth is the object I pursue:  
after it alone are my enquiries di-  
rected: I am always afraid of tak-  
ing the shadow for the substance.  
What then would I desire at this  
day?

day? That PROVIDENCE had *miraculously* interposed to preserve from every *alteration* this precious book, which appears to have been abandoned, like all other books, to the dangerous influence of *second causes*.

Have I thoroughly investigated what I would desire? I perceive, in general, the need of an extraordinary interference, to preserve the deposition in its native purity. I would desire, therefore, that God should have *inspired*, or in an *extraordinary manner* directed, all the transcribers, all the translators, and all the booksellers of every age and of every place; or that he had prevented the wars, the conflagrations, the inundations, and in general all the revolutions, which have destroyed

ed the *original writings* of the *witnesses*.

But would not this *extraordinary* interference have been a *perpetual miracle*, and would a *perpetual miracle* have been really a *miracle*? Would such an intervention have been reconcileable to the œconomy of *Wisdom*? If natural means could have sufficed to preserve in its primitive integrity the whole of this precious deposition, would it be philosophical in me, to require a perpetual miracle, in order to prevent some words from having been substituted transposed, or omitted? As well might I demand a perpetual *miracle*, to prevent each individual from erring in matters of belief, &c.

I blush

I blush for my objections, and confess that my desire was absurd. What excuses it in my own eyes, is, that I conceived it, in the simplicity of an honest heart, sincerely enquiring after truth, and had not at first perceived it.



## SECTION XI.

## TRUTH OF THE WRITTEN DEPOSITION.

**I**F I am sufficiently convinced of the authenticity of this deposition, which is the grand object of my enquiries; if I am morally certain, that it has been neither *fabricated*, nor essentially *altered*; can I reasonably doubt of its *truth*? I have already said, that the *truth* of a *history* is its conformity with the *facts*. If I am satisfied, that the miraculous facts contained in the deposition are of such a nature, that they could have been neither *fabricated*, nor admitted to be *true*, had they been false;

false; if it likewise appeared, that the *witnesses*, who publicly and unanimously attested those facts, could neither *deceive* or *be deceived* as to such facts; can I reject their deposition without counteracting, not merely all the rules of sound logic, but the most commonly received maxims of human conduct?

Here a very striking reflection suggests itself to my mind: though it were possible I might conceive some reasonable doubt respecting the *authenticity* of the *historical* writings of the *witnesses*, and might found those doubts upon this circumstance, that those writings were not addressed to any *particular* society, specially charged to preserve them; yet I could not reasonably

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form

form the smallest doubt respecting those *epistles*, addressed by the *witnesses* to particular and numerous societies, which they themselves had founded and governed. How much were those societies interested in the careful preservation of those epistles of their own founders! I, therefore, read those epistles with all the attention in my power, and I see that they every where suppose the *miraculous* facts, contained in the *historical* writings, and frequently refer to them as the immoveable basis of *belief*, and of *doctrine*.

## SECTION XII.

## PROPHECY.

IF the Lawgiver of nature had, *at sundry times, and in divers manners*, announced the *mission* of the Messenger, long before the event; this would undoubtedly be a striking proof of the *truth* of that mission.

This proof would be still more striking, if by a *particular* dispensation of Supreme Wisdom, the oracles, of which I am speaking, had been consigned to the very adversaries of the Messenger, and of his ministers; and if those first and most obstinate adversaries had, until that



time, constantly professed to apply those oracles to the Messenger, or Messiah, who was to come.

I, therefore, open that *book*, which the lineal *descendants* of those very men, who crucified the Messenger, and persecuted his ministers and first followers, present to me at this day, as *authentic* and *divine*. I run over several parts of this *book* and meet with a writing\* which throws me into the most profound astonishment. I think I am reading an anticipated and circumstantial history of the Messenger: I discover in it all his features, his character, and the principal particulars of his life. In a word, I seem to be reading the *deposition* of the *witnesses*.

\* Isaiah, ch. liii.

I cannot

I cannot withdraw my eyes from this surprising picture: what strokes! what colours! what expression! what correspondence with the *facts*! how just, how natural the emblems! What do I say! it is not an emblematical picture of far distant *futurity*, it is a faithful representation of the *present*; and that which is not, is painted as though it were.

“ He grew up as a tender plant,  
“ and as a root out of dry ground ;  
“ he hath no form nor comeliness;  
“ and when we shall see him, there  
“ is no beauty that we should desire  
“ him.”

“ He is despised and rejected of  
“ men: a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid

“ as it were our faces from him : he  
“ was despised, and we esteemed  
“ him not.”

“ He hath borne our griefs, and  
“ carried our sorrows.—He was  
“ wounded for our transgressions  
“ and bruised for our iniquities : the  
“ chastisement of our peace was up-  
“ on him, and by his stripes we are  
“ healed.”

——“ He opened not his mouth ;  
“ he is brought as a lamb to the  
“ slaughter : and as a sheep before  
“ her shearers is dumb, so he open-  
“ ed not his mouth.”

“ He was taken from prison and  
“ from judgment ; and who shall  
“ declare his generation ? for he was  
“ cut

“ cut off out of the land of the liv-  
 “ ing : for the transgression of my  
 “ people was he stricken.”

“ He made his grave with the  
 “ wicked, and with the rich in his  
 “ death; because he had done no  
 “ violence, neither was deceit in his  
 “ mouth.”

——“ When he shall have made  
 “ his foul an offering for sin, he  
 “ shall see his seed; he shall pro-  
 “ long his days, and the pleasure of  
 “ the Eternal shall prosper in his  
 “ hand.”

“ Therefore shall the Eternal di-  
 “ vide him a portion with the great;  
 “ he shall divide the spoil with the  
 “ strong; because he hath poured



“ out his soul unto death: and he  
“ was numbered with the transgres-  
“ sors; and he bare the sin of ma-  
“ ny, and made intercession for the  
“ transgressors.”

Has He, who thus painted the Sun of righteousness, also marked out the time of his rising? I can hardly believe my own eyes, when I read in another *writing*\* of the same book, this amazing oracle, which might be considered as a *chronological* history, composed after the *event*.

“ Seventy weeks are determined  
“ upon thy people, and upon thy  
“ holy city, to finish the transgres-  
“ sion, to make an end of sin, to

\* Daniel, ch. ix.

“ make

“ make reconciliation for iniquity,  
“ to bring in an everlasting righte-  
“ ousness, to seal up the vision and  
“ prophecy, and to anoint the Most  
“ Holy.”

“ Know therefore, and under-  
“ stand, that from the going forth  
“ of the commandment to restore  
“ and build the city, unto the Mes-  
“ siah the Prince, there shall be  
“ seven weeks and threescore and  
“ two weeks.”

“ And after threescore and two  
“ weeks shall the Messiah be cut  
“ off, but not for himself.”——

“ And he shall confirm the cove-  
“ nant with many for one week,  
“ and in the midst of the week he

“shall cause the sacrifice and the  
“oblation to cease.”

I know that these *weeks* in the prophecy are *weeks of years*, each *week* comprehending seven years. The event here mentioned was not to take place, therefore, till the end of 490 years.

History informs me of the time, when the Messiah, announced by the prophecy, came. I go back, therefore, to the 490th year from this Messiah; for the *event* must be the surest *interpretation* of the *prophecy*.

I thus arrive at the reign of that Prince, from whom, in fact, the last order *issued*, for the *restoration* of that nation, then under captivity in his  
domi-

dominions; and it is from the hand of this very nation, that I receive this prophecy, which betrays and confounds it.

Shall I doubt of the *authenticity* of the *writings*, in which those astonishing prophecies are contained? But the nation, with which they have always been deposited, has never *doubted* of it: what can I oppose to a testimony so ancient, so constant, and so uniform? I shall not imagine, that this nation has *fabricated* such writings. How absurd the imagination! Would not the prophecies themselves contradict it? Would it not also be contradicted by many other places of the same writings, which load this nation with ignominy, and so bitterly reproach it  
for



for its disorders and crimes? It has, therefore, neither fabricated, nor altered, nor lopped off any part; since it has allowed chapters to remain, which are so mortifying to itself, and so favourable to the society which acknowledges the Messiah for its Founder.

Shall I have recourse to the strange supposition, that the *correspondency* of the events with the prophecies, is the effect of *chance*? But in the *coincidence* of so many different circumstances, shall I discover any traces of a *blind* cause?

There arises in my mind amore reasonable doubt: can I demonstrate to my own satisfaction, that those prophecies with which I am so struck,

struck, have in reality, for five or six centuries, preceded the events which they announce in such precise and clear terms? Do I know any contemporary monuments, which attest to me, that the authors of the writings in question, lived five or six centuries before the Messiah? I shall not entangle myself in this learned and laborious enquiry: I perceive a shorter, more easy, and more certain route, and which will conduct me to a more decisive conclusion.

I learn from history, that these *writings* were *translated into Greek*, in the reign of Ptolomy Philadelphus, one of the kings of Egypt. I consult this famous *version*, and find in it the same prophecies which present

sent themselves to me in the *original* text. This version which was executed by *seventy interpreters* of the same nation, into whose hands the original text was deposited, preceded the birth of the Messiah about three centuries. I am, therefore, certain, that the prophecies now under my consideration preceded the *events* which they announce, at least *three centuries*.

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There is not the least ground to suspect, that the members of the society founded by the Messiah, *foisted* into this *version* those prophecies which were so favourable to themselves. Would not the nation, the guardian of the *original text*, have at once exclaimed against such an imposture? Besides, must they not have

have also *foisted* them into all the writings of the Doctors of that nation? For those Doctors quote these very prophecies, and hesitate not to apply them to the Messenger who was to come.

If the Author of man, in order to give him a greater number of *proofs* of his *future destination*, wished to join to the *language of signs*, already so persuasive, the *prophetical* or *typical language*, He will have given to this language, *characters* equally expressive as those he has given to that of *signs*. He will have so appropriated it to the *future events*, which it was to *represent*, that it can be *exactly* or *completely* applied to those events only. He will have published it at such a *time*, and in such *circumstances*,



ees, that it was *impossible* for the human mind, *naturally* to deduce from that *time*, and those *circumstances*, the *future* existence of those *events*. And because, if this *language* had been very perspicuous, men might have opposed the birth of the *events*; it will have been intermixed with *shades* and *light*: it will have had sufficient *light* to shew, at the birth of the *events*, that the Lawgiver had *spoken*; and it will not have had so much, as might excite the criminal passions of men.

All these *characters* I discover in the *prophecies* under my eye. In the same book I see many other *prophecies*\*, scattered up and down, and

\* The following Note from Madam Genlis on Religion, printed in Dublin, 12mo. p. 77, contains many of the Prophecies. See Genlis.

and which are scarcely less significant. "They pierced my hands.  
 "—They parted my garments  
 among

' If one man had written a book of predictions  
 ' relative to Jesus Christ, as to the time and  
 ' manner of his coming, and that Christ had  
 ' come conformably to these predictions, this  
 ' would have had infinite weight; but there is  
 ' much more in that which has just been spoken  
 ' of. It is a succession of men, who, during four  
 ' thousand years, constantly and without variation  
 ' on come, one after the other, to foretell the  
 ' same event. It is a whole people which announces it,  
 ' and which has existed four hundred years, still to bear witness of the assurances  
 ' which they have of it, and from which they  
 ' cannot be turned aside by any threats or persecutions  
 ' whatsoever; this is quite another consideration.—

' The time is predicted by the state of the  
 ' Jewish people, by the state of the pagans, by  
 ' the state of the temple, and by the number of  
 ' years.

' It

“ among them and cast lots upon  
 “ my vesture,” &c.

Who,

‘ It is foretold that the Messiah would come  
 ‘ and form a new alliance, which would cause  
 ‘ the going out of Egypt to be forgotten (Jer.  
 ‘ xxiii. 7.); that he would establish his law, not  
 ‘ exteriorly, but in the heart (Isaiah li. 7.); that  
 ‘ he would “ put his law in their inward parts,  
 ‘ and write in their hearts,” (Jer. xxxi. 33. and  
 ‘ xxxii. 40.)

‘ The church would be small in the begin-  
 ‘ ning, but that it would afterwards encrease  
 ‘ (Ezek. xlvii. 1, and following verses).’

‘ It is predicted, that ‘idols should then be  
 ‘ destroyed, and images made to cease out of  
 ‘ Noph; that there should be no more a prince  
 ‘ of the land of-Egypt, and that God would put  
 ‘ a fear in the land of Egypt (Ezek. xxx. 13).’

‘ That the temples of the idols should be  
 ‘ thrown down; and that among all nations,  
 ‘ and in every place, pure sacrifices, and to ani-  
 ‘ mals, should be offered to the Lord. (Mal. i.  
 ‘ xi.)

That

Who, but He alone, to whom all  
*ages* are as a *moment*, could unfold to  
man a futurity so remote, and *call*  
*the*

‘ That God would teach men of his ways  
(Isaiah ii. 3. Mich. iv. 2, &c.)

‘ That he would be king of the Jews and the  
Gentiles (Psal. ii. 6 and 8. lxxi. 8, &c.)

‘ And no man ever came before or after who  
taught any thing that approached these things.

‘ The Jews, by putting Jesus Christ to death,  
that they might not receive him for Messiah,  
gave him the last mark of a Messiah. By con-  
tinuing to reject him they have made them-  
selves irreproachable witnesses; and by cru-  
cifying and renouncing him they have accom-  
plished the prophecies.

‘ Who would not discover Jesus Christ by so  
many particular circumstances, which have  
been predicted of him! for it is said,

‘ That he would have a messenger sent before  
him, (Mal. iii. 1.)

‘ That a child should be born whose name  
should be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The  
Mighty



*the things which are not, as though they were !*

N. B.

‘ Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The  
‘ Prince of Peace (Isaiah ix. 6.)

‘ That he should be born in the city of Beth-  
‘ lehem (Mich. v. 2.)

‘ That he should come from the family of  
‘ Judah (Gen. xlix. 8, and the following verses),  
‘ and of the posterity of David (2 Kings vii. 12.  
‘ and Isaiah vii. 13); that he should appear in  
‘ Jerusalem principally (Mal. iii. 1. Hag. ii. 10).

‘ That his glory should overcome the wise and  
‘ learned (Isaiah vi. 10); that he should an-  
‘ nounce the Gospel to the poor and meek  
‘ (Isaiah lxi. 1), open the eyes of the blind, un-  
‘ stop the ears of the deaf, and make the lame  
‘ man leap as a hart (Isaiah xxxv. 5 and 6);  
‘ that he would bring the blind by a way that  
‘ they knew not, and lead them by paths that  
‘ they had not known; that he would make  
‘ darkness light before them (Isaiah xlii. 16.)

‘ That he would shew the right way (Isaiah  
‘ xxx. 21), and be a preceptor to the Gentiles  
‘ (Isaiah lv. 4).

‘ That

N. B. For an account of prophecies in the New Testament, and their completion, vid. Beattie's Evidence

‘ That he would be a victim for the sins of  
‘ the world ; that he would be wounded for  
‘ our transgressions, and bruised for our ini-  
‘ quities, (Isaiah liii. 5.)

‘ That he would be the foundation and pre-  
‘ cious stone of the corner (Isaiah xxviii. 16.)

‘ That he would be for a stone of stumbling,  
‘ and for a rock of offence (Isaiah viii. 14.)

‘ That many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem  
‘ should stumble thereon, and fall and be broken  
‘ (Isaiah viii. 15.)

‘ That the builders should refuse this stone  
(Ps. cxvii. 22.)

‘ That he would make this stone which the  
‘ builders refused to become the head stone of the  
‘ corner.

‘ And that this stone would become a great  
‘ mountain, and fill the whole earth (Dan. ii. 35).

‘ That therefore it would be rejected (Psal.  
‘ cxvii. 22), despised and rejected of men (Is.  
‘ liii.

dence of Christianity, chap. II. Sec. II. or Newton on the prophecies.

‘ liii. 2 and 3), betrayed (Pf. xl. 10), old (Zech. xi. 12), smitten, (Is. l. 6), mocked (Is. xxxiv. 19) afflicted in an infinity of manners (Pf. lxxvii. 27), should quench his thirst with gall (Pf. lxxviii. 22); that his hands and feet would be pierced (Pf. xxi. 17); that his face would be spit upon (Isaiah l. 6); that he would be put to death (Dan. ix. 26); that they would cast lots for his garments (Pf. xxi. 19).

‘ That he would rise up from the dead (Pf. xv. 10).

‘ On the third day (Hof. vi. 2).

‘ That he would ascend into heaven (Pf. xlv. 6. and lxvii. 19).

‘ To sit at the right hand of God (Pf. cix. 1).

‘ That kings would arm themselves against him (Pf. ii. 2).

‘ That being at the right-hand of the Father, he would overcome all his enemies (Pf. cix. 5).

‘ That the kings of the earth and all the people would worship him (Pf. lxxi. 11).’

## SECTION XIII.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE FOUN-  
DER.\*

IF Divine Wisdom has really deigned to descend upon the earth, to enlighten mortal men, I must undoubtedly discover, in the *doctrine* of his Messenger, the indelible marks of this Adorable Wisdom.

This grand subject demands the most profound meditation: I begin by tracing to myself the *characters*

\* Vid. Beattie's Evidence of Christianity, ch. i. and ch. ii. sect. 4.

which



which, in my opinion, this doctrine ought to possess, in order to appear conformable to the most pure light of *reason*, and to add to that light, what the *wants* of humanity required, and what that light could not furnish.

I cannot deny, that *man* is a social being, and that many of his principal *faculties* have the state of *society*, *directly* for their object. The gift of speech alone is sufficient to convince me of this. The doctrine of a celestial Messenger must, therefore, rest essentially upon the great principles of *sociability*. It must have the most direct tendency to perfect and ennoble all the natural sentiments which link man to his fellow-creatures: it must multiply and  
lengthen

lengthen to infinity the cords of *humanity*: it must present to man, the love of his fellow-creatures, as the most abundant and most pure source of his *present* and *future* happiness. Is there any principle of sociability more refined, more noble, more active, more faithful, than that exalted benevolence, which, in the doctrine of the Messiah, bears the \*uncommon and expressive name of *charity*? “A new commandment

\* I do not say *new*, though I might, in a certain sense. Cicero, in his Fifth Book *De Finibus*, has the following beautiful passage: In “omni autem honesto, nihil est tam illustre, “nec quod latius pateat, quam conjunctio inter “homines hominum, et quasi quædam societas “et communicatio voluptatum et ipsa *charitas* “*generis humani*,” &c. This philosopher uttered to his own age the first accents of *charity*.

H

“give

“ give I unto you, that you love one  
“ another.—By this shall all men  
“ know that ye are my disciples, if  
“ ye have love one to another.\*—  
“ Greater love than this hath no  
“ man, than that he lay down his  
“ life for his friends.” And who were  
the friends of the Messenger? Men  
of all ages and of all places: he *died*  
for the *human race*.

In these repeated precepts of brotherly love, in this sublime law of charity, do I not, shall I not, acknowledge the *Founder* and ~~Law~~-*giver* of *universal society*? In this grand example of beneficence, in this voluntary sacrifice, shall I not

\* John, ch. xv.

acknowledge

acknowledge the most true and most generous FRIEND OF MEN ?

The perfection of the heart is always an object of the highest concern: the heart is the *universal* principle of all the *affections*: a doctrine from heaven would not confine itself to the *regulation* of the external actions of *man*: it would also carry its happy influences into the most secret recesses of the heart. "You have  
" heard, that it hath been said, Thou  
" shalt not commit adultery; but I  
" say unto you, that whosoever  
" looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery  
" already with her in his heart."  
What, then, is this new doctrine, which condemns the crime *thought of*, as well as the crime *committed*? It is



the doctrine of that superior Philosopher, who well knew how man was formed, and that such was the constitution of his being, that a *movement* too strongly impressed upon *certain* parts of the brain, might insensibly lead him to *criminal indulgence*. This will be easily *comprehended* by the philosopher. The senseless *voluptuary* would at least *feel* it, could he perceive his own heart through the impurities of his imagination. *But, I say unto you* ; it is the language of a Master ; and what a Master ! *He spake as one having authority*. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good ; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil. How simple the expressions ! how true, how

how admirable the thought! *The good man*;—not the *great man*; it is much better:—*his good treasure—his heart—the heart of the good man.*

There is no passion more inimical to the *social spirit* than *revenge*. There is none which more cruelly tyrannizes over the heart, where it has unhappily obtained possession. A doctrine from heaven would not, therefore, confine itself to the simple reprehension of a sentiment so dangerous and so unworthy of a *social being*: it would not confine itself even to demand of him the sacrifice of his resentments: far less would it allow him to *retaliate*: it would inspire him with the most exalted *heroism*, and teach him to punish the

offender by acts of kindness.\* “ Ye  
 “ have heard that it hath been said,  
 “ An eye for an eye, and a tooth  
 “ for a tooth ; but I say unto  
 “ you,—Love your enemies, bless  
 “ them who curse you, do good  
 “ to them who despitefully use  
 “ you and persecute you.—For if  
 “ you love your brethren only, what  
 “ do you more than others?” And  
 what *motive* is here proposed by the  
 Author of a doctrine, so well calculated to ennoble the heart of the social being? “ That ye may be the  
 “ children of your Father who is in  
 “ heaven; for he maketh his sun to  
 “ rise on the evil and on the good,  
 “ and sendeth his rain on the just  
 “ and on the unjust.” The truly  
 social being, therefore, does, like  
 Providence,

\* Matt. ch. v.

Providence, dispense his favours. He does good to all men; and though he acts upon general principles, the exceptions from those principles are likewise *favours*, and the greatest favours. Judicious in his distribution of the goods of Providence, he knows, when necessary, how to proportion them to the excellence of the beings to whom he distributes them. He incessantly advances towards perfection, because he serves a MASTER who is *perfect*.—*Be ye perfect*.

A doctrine, which reprobates the very *idea* of *revenge*, and which allows the heart only a choice of favours, will undoubtedly enjoin *reconciliation*, and the pardon of *personal* injuries. The truly social being is too great, ever to be inaccessible to



reconciliation and pardon. \* “There-  
 “ fore, if thou bring thy gift to the  
 “ altar, and there rememberest that  
 “ thy brother hath aught against thee,  
 “ leave there thy gift before the al-  
 “ tar, and go thy way, first be re-  
 “ conciled to thy brother, and then  
 “ come and offer thy gift.” Because  
 the God of *peace*, who is the God of  
*universal* society, desires the sacrifices  
 of peace. *To the altar*—it would pro-  
 fane it. *Before the altar*—it will re-  
 main there but for a moment.  
 † “How oft shall I forgive my bro-  
 “ ther? till seven times?” was the  
 question of a disciple, whose soul  
 was not yet sufficiently ennobled.  
*Until seventy times seven*, answered  
 He, who *always* pardoned, because  
 he had *always* occasion to pardon.

\* Matt. chap. 6.

† Matt. chap. 18.

A doctrine which breathed only *charity*, would apparently make *toleration* one of the first *laws* of the *social* being: for it would be contrary to the nature of things, that a social being were *intolerant*. Men as yet *carnal*, would dispose of the *fire of heaven*: \* *Master, wilt thou—*  
What reply does the Friend of man give to this inhuman rash demand?  
“ Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: I am not come to  
“ destroy men’s lives, but to save  
“ them.” Shall men, therefore, who call themselves the disciples of this good Master, persecute their fellow-men, because they have the misfortune not to affix to certain words the same ideas with them.

\* Luke, chap. 9.

selves? Will they employ fire and sword to—I cannot proceed—I shudder with horror—This dreadful night begins to be dispelled—A ray of light has penetrated into it—May the Sun of righteousness at last drive it from the world !

A doctrine from heaven must instruct man in the knowledge of those things which constitute his *real happiness*. He is a *sensible* being : he has *affections* : he must have objects to satisfy his *desires* : he must have objects to possess his *heart*. But what objects would such a doctrine present to a being, who lives upon the earth but for a few moments, and whose true country is *heaven* ? Should this being, whose immortal soul swallows up time, and grasps at eternity, fix his heart upon objects which

*time*

*time* can devour? Should this being, endowed with so great discernment, mistake the fleeting colours of the dew-drop for the brilliancy of the diamond? \* “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust do corrupt, and thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust do corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” What more true, and what more sensibly felt by him who has the happiness to lay up for himself such a treasure! His heart is wholly there. This man has already *sat down in*

\* Matt. chap. 9.



*heavenly places. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and he shall be filled.*

If a doctrine from heaven prescribed any religious worship, this would be in direct relation with the nature of the *understanding* ; and be equally suited to the dignity of a moral being, and to the majesty and spirituality of the Supreme Being. “ Learn what this means, I will “ have mercy, and not sacrifice.” *Mercy*—the thing *signified*, and not the *sign*. \* “ The hour cometh, and “ now is, when the true worship- “ pers shall worship the Father in “ spirit and in truth : for the Father “ seeketh such to worship him.

\* John, chap. 4.

“ God

“ God is a spirit, and they who  
“ worship him, must worship him  
“ in spirit and in truth.” *In spirit—  
in truth.*—These two words exhaust  
every thing, and are themselves in-  
exhaustible: but they may be for-  
gotten: blind *superstition* never knew  
them.

But because man is a sensible be-  
ing, and because a religion which  
would reduce every thing to pure  
*spirituality*, could not be sufficiently  
calculated for such a being; a doc-  
trine from heaven would not fail to  
strike the *senses* by something exter-  
nal. This doctrine would, there-  
fore, establish an *external worship*;  
it would institute *ceremonies*; but  
their number would be small, and  
their noble *simplicity* and *expression*  
would

would be exactly appropriated to the *particular design* of the institution, and to the *spirituality* of *internal* worship.

In like manner also, because it is one of the *natural* effects of *prayer*, to remind man of his weaknesses, his miseries, his wants; because it is another *natural* effect of this *religious act*, to imprint on the *brain* those *dispositions* which are most proper for overcoming the too strong impressions of sensible objects; in fine, because *prayer* is an essential part of that reasonable homage, which an *intelligent* creature owes to his CREATOR; a doctrine from heaven would excite man to *prayer*, and make it one of his *duties*. It would even prescribe him a *form*, and would  
exhort

exhort him *not to use vain repetitions*. And as the mind cannot remain long in that profound recollection which *prayer* requires, the *form* prescribed would be very short, and contain only the most *necessary* things, expressed in terms very forcible, and *extensive* in their signification.

It would also be perfectly in the spirit of a doctrine from heaven, to correct the judgments of men respecting *moral evil*, the confused mixture of the *good* with the *bad*, and respecting the *conduct* of PROVIDENCE in general. Here modern philosophy rises very high, yet does not attain to the height of this popular philosophy, which, under familiar images, conceals the most transcend-

ant



ant truths. \* “ Sir, didst not thou  
 “ sow good seed in thy field?  
 “ Whence then hath it tares? Wilt  
 “ thou that we go and gather them  
 “ up? Nay, said he, lest while you  
 “ gather up the tares, ye root up  
 “ also the wheat with them. Let  
 “ both grow up until the harvest;  
 “ and in the time of harvest I shall  
 “ say unto the reapers, gather ye  
 “ together first the tares, and bind  
 “ them in bundles—but gather the  
 “ wheat into my barn.” Men ignorant of agriculture would anticipate the *season*, and clear the field before the *time*. They would not have done so, had they been permitted to open the *great book* of the Master of the harvest.

\* Matt. chap. 13.

If

If *self-love* be the universal principle of man's actions ; if he can never be more surely directed to what is good, than by the hope of rewards and the fear of punishments ; if a doctrine from heaven is to support the *morality* of *motives*, which are capable of influencing men of every rank ; such a doctrine will unquestionably announce to the human race a *future state* of *happiness*, or of *miser*y, according to the nature of *moral* actions. It will give the most magnificent ideas of *future happiness*, and paint *future misery* in the most frightful colours. And as these objects are of such a nature, that they cannot be represented to men, but by comparisons taken from things with which they are best acquainted ; this doctrine will have frequent recourse to

to such comparisons. There will be *banquets, marriages, crowns, fulness of joy, rivers of delight, &c.* or there will be *tears, gnashing of teeth, darkness, the gnawing worm, devouring fire, &c.* In fine, because *threatenings* cannot be too *restraining*; since it every day happens, that men willingly expose themselves to years of misery and pain, for the pleasure of a moment, \* it would be perfectly in the spirit of this doctrine, to represent *punishments* as *eternal*, or at least as a *wretchedness* of *indefinite* duration. But while it discovered this dreadful abyss to the eyes of *sensual* men, this word of life would at the same time exalt the compassions of the

\* M. Bonnet must be implicitly followed in his sentiments here.

common

common FATHER of men, and would permit them to see, upon the brink of the abyfs, a beneficent hand, which—if juſtice in the Supreme Being be goodneſs directed by wiſdom—if Sovereign Beneficence eſſentially deſires the perfection of all ſentient and intelligent beings—if *pains* can be a natural means of perfection—if there is more joy in heaven over a ſinner that repenteth—if he loves much, to whom much has been forgiven—my heart bounds—I am loſt in admiration—How marvellous the chain—The compaſſions of Him who alone is good, are infinite—he deſireth not the death of the ſinner, but his converſion and life—He deſireth, and does he deſire in vain?

But



But would a doctrine, which influenced men by motives of *interest*, be a doctrine from heaven? Ought it not, on the contrary, to *direct* men to *goodness*, by the *pure* and *disinterested* love of goodness? A soul that loves perfection, may be easily seduced by a sublime idea of perfection. Ought I not here to beware of this sort of illusion? Would a doctrine, which presented no other *motive* to men, than a philosophical consideration of the *satisfaction* attached to the *practice of goodness*, be a doctrine sufficiently *universal* and *efficacious*? Would the pleasure attached to intellectual and moral excellence be felt by every man? Would this delicate, this pure and angelic pleasure have sufficient influence in all cases, and in those principally  
where

where the passions and appetites tyrannize over the soul, and so powerfully solicit it to criminal gratifications? What do I say? Is man an angel? Is his body of an *ethereal* substance? Do not flesh and blood enter into his composition? He who made man, knows what is necessary for him, better than the philosopher too much enamoured of *imaginary* excellence. The Author of all true excellence has appropriated the most sure and most efficacious means to the most important end. He has suited his precepts to the nature and necessities of that mixed being, whom he would rouse and restrain. To the sage he has spoken by the voice of wisdom; to the people by that of feeling and authority. Great and generous souls may conform to  
order

order through their love of order : souls of a less noble frame may be directed to the same end by the hope of reward, or by the fear of punishment. In recalling man to moral rectitude, the Author of man does at the same time recal him to *reason*. He says to him, Do good, and thou shalt be happy. *Sow, and thou shalt reap*, is a faithful expression of the truth, the relation of the cause to the effect : a grain thrown into the ground, is there expanded.

If man is by his nature a mixed being ; if his soul exercises all its *faculties* through the intervention of a body ; a doctrine which came from heaven would not only inform man of the immortality of the soul,  
it

it would inform him also of the \* *immortality* of his *being*. And if this doctrine borrowed *comparisons* from what takes place in *plants*, it would speak to the people a familiar, but most expressive language. “ The  
 “ hour is coming, in which all that  
 “ are in their graves shall hear the  
 “ voice of the Son of God, and shall  
 “ come forth, they that have done  
 “ good, to the resurrection of life,  
 “ and they that have done evil, to  
 “ the resurrection of damnation.”  
 It will not, therefore, be the soul alone, which will enjoy this immortality, it will be the *whole man*. *I am the resurrection and the life*.—Astonishing words ! Language like this, the ear has never heard ! The ma-

\* Vid. 1st Corinthians, chap. 15.



jefty of the expreffions announces the Prince of life!—*I am the refurrection.*—He commands death, and ftrips the *grave of its victory.*

## SECTION XIV.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE DISCIPLES OF THE FOUNDER.—  
PARALLEL BETWEEN THEM,  
THE DOCTORS OF THE SYNAGOGUE, AND THE SAGES OF  
PAGANISM.

IF, after having heard Wisdom itself, I listen to those extraordinary men whom it inspired, I shall think I hear it still, because it will still speak. I shall not, therefore, any more put the question to myself, how simple fishermen could have dictated to the human race a system of *morality*, far superior to every thing which reason had hitherto

I

con-

conceived; a system which comprehends every *duty*; which traces every duty to its true *source*; which makes but one family of all the different societies scattered upon the face of the earth; which closely links together all the members of this family; which unites this family to the great family of heavenly intelligences; and which calls Him, whose goodness extends from the *sparrow* to the cherub, the Father of those families. I shall easily perceive, that so exalted a philosophy sprung not from the mud of Jordan, and that so bright a light did not issue from the thick darkness of the *synagogue*.

I shall be more strongly confirmed in this thought, if I have the patience,

tience, or the courage, to peruse the writings of the most famous Doctors of that fanatical and haughty synagogue; and if I compare these writings with those of the men whom it persecuted, because their virtues tormented and provoked it. What monstrous collections of dreams and visions! What absurdities heaped upon absurdities! What abuse of interpretation! What strange neglect of reason! What insults upon common sense! &c. I attempt to dive into this morass; its depth astonishes me; I dive again, and draw forth a *precious* book, so much disfigured, that I can hardly recognize it.

I afterwards turn to the fages of paganism; I open the immortal



writings of a Plato, a Xenophon, a Cicero, &c. and my eyes are delighted with those first appearances of the morning of reason. But how weak, how confused, how uncertain! What clouds to be penetrated!—Night is hardly ended: day has not yet commenced: the Sun from on high has not yet appeared: but those sages hope for and expect his rising.

I cannot refuse my admiration to those ingenious men. They afforded to human nature, consolation against the outrages which it received from superstition and barbarity. They were in some respects the *forerunners* of that reason, which was to bring life and immortality to light. I would apply to them, if I durst, what

what a writer, who was much more than ingenious, said of the prophets; *They were lights shining in a dark place.*

But the more I study those sages of paganism, the more am I satisfied that they had not arrived at that *plenitude* of doctrine, which I discover in the works of the *fishermen*, and in those of the *tent-maker*. In the sages of paganism, all is not *homogeneous*, all is not equally valuable; and sometimes I perceive the *pearl upon the dunghill*. They say admirable things, which seem to resemble *inspiration*. But, I know not how it happens, these things do not reach the heart, like those which I read in the writings of the men, whom human philosophy had not

enlightened. In the latter I find a *pathos*, an unction, a gravity, a strength of sentiment and thought, I had almost said, a strength of nerve and muscle, which I do not find in the former. The latter reach the very vitals of my soul; the former address themselves to my understanding. And how much more persuasive are the fishermen, than the sages of paganism! because they were more strongly persuaded themselves: because they had *seen, heard, and felt!*

I discover many other circumstances which appear to me very much to distinguish the disciples of Jesus Christ from those of Socrates, and especially from those of Zeno. I stop to consider those distinguish-  
ing

ing circumstances, and the most striking are, that compleat neglect of self, which allows the soul no other sentiment, but that of the importance and greatness of its object; and to the heart no other desire, but that of faithfully answering its destination, and doing good to all men: that *collected* patience which supports the trials of life; not only because it is great and philosophical to support them, but because they are dispensations of a wise Providence, in whose eyes resignation is the most graceful homage: that elevation of thoughts and views, that great courage, which render the soul superior to all events, because they render it superior to itself: that firm adherence to truth and goodness, which nothing can shake, because this truth



and goodness do not depend upon *opinion*, but are built upon the *demonstration of the spirit and of power*: that just valuation of things.—But how far are such men above my feeble panegyric! They have painted themselves in their writings: in them they wish to be contemplated: and what parallel can be drawn between the pupils of Divine wisdom, and those of human?

## SECTION XV.

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.—ITS  
PRINCIPLES AND MANNERS.—  
TACIT OR EXPRESS CONCESSIONS OF ADVERSARIES.

**D**ID those sages of Paganism, who said such excellent things, and who were so much admired by adepts, root out one single prejudice from the minds of the people, or overthrow the smallest idol? Did Socrates, whom I would call the *institutor* of natural morality, and who was the first martyr of reason in the Pagan world; did the prodigious SOCRATES change the worship of

Athens, or effect the slightest revolution in the manners of his country?

In a short time after the death of JESUS CHRIST, I see a society, of which the sages of Paganism had not even conceived the possibility, forming itself in an obscure corner of the earth. This society is almost entirely composed of Socrateses and Epictetuses. All its members are closely united in the bonds of fraternal love, and of the most pure and active benevolence. One spirit possesses them all, the spirit of their Founder. They all adore the Supreme Being, *in spirit* and *in truth*; and the religion of all consists in \* “visiting the  
“fatherless and widows in their af-

\* Epistle of James, chap. 1.

“fiction,

“ fliction, and in keeping them-  
“ selves unspotted from the world.  
“ —They ate their meat with glad-  
“ nefs and finglenefs of heart—they  
“ \* had no poor amongft them; for  
“ as many as were poffeffors of lands  
“ and houfes, fold them, and brought  
“ the prices to the conductors of  
“ the fociety. In a word, I think  
“ I am contemplating a new *terref-*  
“ *trial paradise*: but all its trees are  
“ *trees of life*.

What, then, is the fecret caufe of  
this great phenomenon in morality?  
By what prodigy, unknown to all  
preceding ages, does a fociety fpring  
up, in the bofom of corruption and  
fanaticifm, whose principle is the  
love of mankind, whose end is their

\* Acts, chap. 4.



happiness, whose motive is the approbation of the SOVEREIGN JUDGE, whose *hope* is eternal life?

Do I not deceive myself? Might not the first historian of this society have exaggerated its virtues, its manners, its actions? But the men, of whom he speaks, were quickly known in the world, surrounded, beset, observed and persecuted by a crowd of malicious foes: and if adversity discovers the characters of men, I must allow, that no men could ever have been better known than these were. If, therefore, their historian had exaggerated, or disguised the facts, is it to be supposed, that he would not have been attacked by suspicious, vigilant, prejudiced contemporaries, who were not animated by the same interest?

But

But can I, upon any solid grounds, entertain the least suspicion of the testimony contained in the famous letter of a magistrate\*, not less intelligent than virtuous, who was particularly charged by a great prince† to watch over the conduct of the new men, who were in all places under the eye of the police? This remarkable testimony is the substance of that which was given to the *new society*, by the very men who had abandoned and betrayed it; which testimony was not contradicted by the magistrate, who lays it before the prince.

“ They declared, that their whole  
 “ error, or fault, consisted in these

\* Pliny the Younger.

† Trajan.

“ par-

“ particulars: that, upon a certain  
“ day, they used to assemble before  
“ sun-rise, and sing a hymn in praise  
“ of Christ, as if he had been a  
“ God; that they bound themselves  
“ by an oath, not to the commission  
“ of any crime, but to abstain from  
“ theft and adultery, to keep their  
“ promises, and not refuse to restore  
“ whatever was committed to their  
“ trust; that when this was done,  
“ they usually separated, and met  
“ again to eat in common their  
“ innocent meal.”

I seem to be still reading the historian of this extraordinary society. They who gave so advantageous a testimony to its principles and manners, were at the same time certain of the protection of the prince, and  
of

of his ministers, and might have calumniated it with impunity. The magistrate does not gainsay this testimony ; has he, therefore, nothing to oppose to it? He, therefore, tacitly acknowledges those principles and manners? “ Is it,” says he, “ the name alone, or the crimes attached to that name, which ought to be punished?” He most evidently insinuates, that it was *a name which was punished, rather than crimes*. How singular an agreement between two writers, whose religious opinions and views were so different! How great the monument! how great the eulogium! The magistrate is the contemporary of the historian: they both see the same objects, and almost in the same manner. Is it possible that the truth should not be here?

But



But the magistrate throws a reproach upon this society of *good men*: and what is that reproach? “A *contumacious and inflexible obstinacy, which appeared to him worthy of punishment.*” “*I judged it necessary,*” adds he, to extort the truth by force of tortures.—*I have discovered nothing but a base superstition carried to excess.*”

Here the magistrate and the historian differ in their views: *a base superstition*: because the magistrate no longer saw facts and manners, but a *doctrine*; and in order to be properly seen, this doctrine required eyes better exercised in observations of this kind: nevertheless, I pay particular attention to this happy opposition between the two writers :

ters: it seems to me to concur, like every other circumstance, in placing the truth in full splendor. The magistrate does not judge of the new society, like one of its secret partisans, but through all his prejudices of birth, education, philosophy, politics, religion, &c. I am pleased to see him mention that *inflexible obstinacy*: what then was the subject of an *obstinacy* which resisted the force of tortures? Was it any particular opinion? No, but facts; and facts of which all the senses could have judged.

## SECTION XVI.

## THE SUCCESS OF THE TESTIMONY—MARTYRS.

**T**HE infant society daily acquires strength; gradually extends itself; and wherever it gains ground, I behold superstition, prejudice, and idolatry fall down before the cross of the Founder.

The capital of the world is quickly peopled by the new converts; it overflows with them: they were, says Tacitus, a huge multitude. They were scattered over the greatest provinces of the empire: of this I am likewise informed by the same magistrate,

magistrate, who was the ornament of his country, and of the age in which he lived. He was governor of two great provinces, Pontus and Bythinia. He writes thus to his master : “ The matter seems to me  
“ worthy of your consideration, on  
“ account of the multitudes involv-  
“ ed in this danger ; for a very  
“ great number of persons of all  
“ ages, of all ranks, of both sexes, are,  
“ and will be, every day brought to  
“ trial. The contagion of this su-  
“ perstition has not only infected  
“ the cities, it has reached also the  
“ villages and the country.—’Tis  
“ certain, that the temples were  
“ almost deserted, the sacrifices ne-  
“ glected, and the victims almost  
“ without purchasers\*.”

\* Plin. Epist. lib. x. ep. 97.



Corinth, Ephesus, Theſſalonica, Philippi, Coloffæ, and many other cities, preſent me with a multitude of inhabitants, who embrace the new doctrine. I find the hiſtory of the foundation of thoſe particular ſocieties, not only in the hiſtorian of the great ſociety, of which they formed a part, but alſo in the letters of that indefatigable diſciple, by whom they were founded.

I ſee *oral tradition* unite with the written, and concur in preſerving and ſtrengthening the *teſtimony*. I ſee the diſciples of the ſecond age, joining hands with thoſe of the firſt; an Irenæus receiving from a Polycarp what he had received from one  
of

of the first eye-witnesses\* ; and this chain of traditional testimony extends, without interruption, through the following ages, &c.

Kings, and their ministers, do from time to time inflict upon this innocent society, cruelties unknown to the most barbarous nations, and shocking to humanity ; and yet in the midst of these horrible persecutions, the society was founded and increased every day.

My

\* John. " I could yet repeat," says Irenæus, " the discourses which Polycarp delivered to the  
" people, and what he related of his conversations with John, and others who had seen  
" the Lord. The account he gave of his person, his miracles and doctrine, he received  
" from eye-witnesses of the word of life ; and  
" this account was exactly conformable to our  
" scriptures."

My attention, however, is not so much excited by this natural effect of *persecution*, as by a species of martyrdom, altogether new. Violent contradictions may irritate and exalt the soul: but those millions of martyrs who expire under tortures, are not martyrs of *opinion*; they die voluntarily in attestation of *facts*. I know that there have been martyrs of opinion in every age, and in almost every place: at this day there are some in those countries \* over which foolish superstition tyrannizes: but I know of none who have died in attestation of facts, except the disciples of Jesus Christ.

“scriptures.” Euseb. b. v. ch. 15. and 20. See the notes of Mr. Seigneux on the work of Mr. Addison, p. 228, 229. tom. 1.

\* India.

I observe

I observe, also, that those men who so courageously sacrifice themselves in support of those facts, are attached to their *creed*, neither by birth, nor education, nor authority, nor any temporal interests. Therefore, I can imagine no other satisfactory reason why they devoted themselves so voluntarily to sufferings and to death, but the strongest conviction of the certainty of the *facts*.

In fine, after three centuries of toils, pains, and tortures, after having combated for three centuries with the armour of patience and charity, the society is triumphant, the new religion ascends the throne of the Cæsars, idolatry is overthrown, and paganism expires.

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## SECTION XVII.

## OBSTACLES TO BE SURMOUNTED.

**W**HAT an astonishing revolution have I been contemplating ! Who were the men who brought it about ? What obstacles had they to surmount ?

A poor man, who had not where to lay his head, who was reputed the son of a carpenter, and who ended his days by an ignominious death, was the Founder of this Religion, which triumphs over Paganism and its monsters.

This

This man chose disciples from the dregs of the people: he took the greatest part of them from among simple fishermen, and to such men he gave commission to publish his religion throughout the earth: *Go and teach all nations.*—*Ye shall be witnesses unto me to the uttermost parts of the earth.*

They obey the voice of their Master; they publish to the nations the *word of life*; they attest the resurrection of the crucified Jesus; the nations believe, and are converted.

Here is the great *phenomenon in morality* which I have to explain: here is a revolution more surprizing than any recorded in history, and

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for which I must assign a satisfactory and *sufficient reason*.

I take a survey of the earth before this great *revolution* happened. Two principal religions present themselves to my view, *theism* and *polytheism*.

I do not mean the *theism* of the pagan philosophers, that inconsiderable number of sages, who like Socrates or Anaxagoras, ascribed the origin of things to an *Eternal Spirit*; these sages did not form any *body*, and abandoned the people to the mire of prejudice and idolatry. They had their hands full of truth, and deigned to open them to those only who were *adepts*.

I mean

I mean the *theism* of that singular and populous nation, separated by its laws, its customs, and even its prejudices, from all other nations, and which believed it had received its religion and laws from the immediate hand of God. This nation is firmly persuaded, that this religion and these laws were supported by divers extraordinary miracles ; it is strongly attached to its *external worship*, its customs, and its *traditions* ; and though it is very much stripped of its pristine splendour, and subjected to a foreign yoke, it still preserves all the pride of its ancient liberty, and thinks itself the sole object of the CREATOR's favour : it has the most sovereign contempt for all other nations, and professes to



expect a Deliverer, who will subject the universe to its sway.

*Polytheism* is almost the universal and reigning religion. It assumes all kinds of forms, according to the climate and genius of the nations. It favours all the passions, even the most monstrous. It abandons the heart, but sometimes restrains the hand. It flatters all the senses, and unites the *flesh with the spirit*. It presents to the people the famous examples of its gods, and those gods are monsters of cruelty and impurity, who must be honoured by *cruelties* and *impurities*. It attracts the eyes of the multitude by its enchantments, its prodigies, its auguries, its divinations, the pomp of its worship, &c. It builds the altar  
of

of vice, and digs the grave of virtue.

How will the fishermen, transformed into *missionaries*, persuade such theists as those, that all their external worship, which is so majestic, so ancient, so venerable, is no longer that which God requires of them, and that it is for ever abolished; that all those august, mysterious ceremonies, so well suited to astonish the senses, are only *shadows* of those things, of which they present to them the substance? How will they force them to acknowledge, that those traditions, to which they were so attached in heart and spirit, are only the *commandments* of men, and that they annihilate that law, which they believe to be di-

vine? How, in particular, will the fishermen persuade those proud theists, that the poor and humble man, whom their magistrates condemned, and who expired upon a cross, is indeed that great Deliverer who had been announced to them, and whom they expected? that they are no longer the sole objects of the *extraordinary* favour of Providence, and that all the nations of the earth are called to participate of this favour?

How will fishermen remove from the eyes of the gross *polytheist*, those *multiplying glasses*, which make him see as many gods as there are objects in nature? How will they spiritualize his ideas, detach him from that inert matter in which he is incorporated, and convert him to the LIV-

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ING GOD? How will they draw him from the seducing pleasures of sense, from voluptuousness of every kind? How will they purify and ennoble all his affections? How will they make him a sage, and more than a sage? How will they restrain his heart as well as his hand? How, in particular, will they persuade him to do homage to a man disgraced by an ignominious death; and convert the *foolishness of the cross into wisdom*, in the eyes of the polytheist?

How will the heralds of the *cru- cified* Jesus induce their new followers to renounce their dearest temporal interests, to live in contempt, in humiliation, in opprobrium; to brave all pains and punishments, to resist all temptations, and to perse-



vere unto death in a doctrine, which promises no recompence in the present, but in a future life?

By what *means*, therefore, does it happen, that the poor fishers are become *fishers of men*? How was it possible, that in less than half a century, so many different nations should embrace the new doctrine? How *has the grain of mustard-seed become a great tree*? How has this tree overshadowed so many great kingdoms?

I know that men in general are not enemies to severity of morals: because it supposes very great efforts: because men have a natural taste for excellence: not that they always aim to attain it; but they are always pleased with it, at least  
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in speculation. Voluntary poverty, great disinterestedness, a painful, laborious life, easily attract the attention and esteem of men. All these they will readily admire, provided they are not obliged to practise them.

If, therefore, this new doctrine were purely *speculative*, I can without much difficulty conceive, that it might have gained the esteem, and even admiration of some nations. They might have regarded it as a new system of philosophy, and its professors might have appeared to them sages of a very particular order. But this doctrine consists not of pure *speculations*; it is wholly *practical*; it is so *essentially*, and in the strictest sense; it is the most ex-

alted kind of *practical heroism*: it supposes the most complete self-denial; combats all the passions; captivates all the inclinations; represses all the desires; allows the heart no other indulgence, but the love of God, and of its neighbour; demands continual sacrifices, and those of the greatest extent; and never proposes any rewards which the eye can see, or the hand can touch.

I conceive also, that the charms of eloquence, the glare of riches, the splendor of dignified rank, the influence of power, will easily procure credit to a doctrine, and gain it many partisans.

But the doctrine of the crucified Jesus is announced by poor simple  
men,

men, whose eloquence consists rather in things than in words; by men who publish things which shock all received opinions; by men of the lowest rank, and who promise to their followers nothing in this life, but sufferings, torments, and *crosses*. And yet these are the men who triumph *over flesh and blood*, and convert the world.

The *effect* is prodigious, rapid, durable; it still exists: I discover no natural cause capable of producing it: it must, nevertheless, have a *cause*, and a great cause: what, then, is that *cause*? *At the name of Jesus, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the blind see, the dead are raised.* I enquire no farther: the whole is explained: the problem is solved.



solved. The Lawgiver of nature has spoken: the nations have heard him, and the universe has acknowledged its Master. He who in the grain of mustard-seed saw the great tree, was therefore the messenger of this Master, who *chose the weak things of the world to confound the strong.*

## SECTION XVIII.

GENERAL DIFFICULTIES.—THE  
LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL HAS  
NOT EXTENDED SO FAR AS THE  
GREATNESS OF ITS DESIGN  
SEEMED TO REQUIRE.—THE  
GREATER NUMBER OF CHRISTI-  
ANS HAVE MADE LITTLE PRO-  
GRESS IN VIRTUE.—ANSWERS.

**B**UT am I not precipitate in my judgment? Am I not too much disposed to believe and admire? Has the universe acknowledged its Master? Has this salutary doctrine converted the whole world? I cast my eye upon the globe, and see with  
asto.

astonishment that this - heavenly light illuminates but a small part of the earth, and that all the rest is covered with thick darkness. And even in the illuminated parts, how many spots !

This difficulty does not appear to me very considerable. If this doctrine of life is to endure as long as the *present state* of our globe, what relation do seventeen centuries bear to its *total* duration ? Perhaps that of seventeen days, perhaps seventeen hours, perhaps less. Shall I judge of the duration of this religion, as I judge of the duration of empires ? Every empire is like grass, and all the glory of empires is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth,  
the

the flower fadeth, but the religion of the Lord endureth : it will survive all empires : its head is to reign till God has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

I examine the difficulty more closely, and perceive, that it amounts precisely to that which may be raised from the unequal distribution of the gifts and advantages of mind and body. This second difficulty, when thoroughly weighed, will lead me into a palpable absurdity. The gifts of the mind, as well as those of the body, depend upon a train of physical circumstances connected with one another, and this chain mounts up to the first instant



instant of creation. That all men, therefore, should have possessed the same gifts, and in the same degree, it would have been necessary, in the first place, that they had not been descended from one another. It would have been necessary, in the second place, that all men had been born in the same climate, and been nourished by the same food; that they had enjoyed the same kind of life, the same education, the same government, &c. For can I deny, that all these things have more or less influence upon the mind? Here the most slight cause carries its influence much farther than I can imagine. Of this I am sufficiently convinced.

So

So that, in order to produce this perfect equality of gifts among all the individuals of the human race, it would have been necessary, that all those individuals should have been cast in the same mould; that the earth every where should have possessed the same degree of light and of heat; that its productions should have been every where the same; that there should have been neither mountains nor vallies, &c. But I should never finish, were I to exhaust this subject.

How many such difficulties will at first strike a man of any penetration, and from which he might see a multitude of absurdities arise, were he capable of analyzing them! The  
mind

mind willingly dwells upon the surface of things; it does not chuse to penetrate them, because it dreads labour and difficulty. Sometimes it has greater dread of the—*truth*.

If, therefore, it was inconsistent with the *state of things*, that all men should partake of the same gifts, and of the same measure of those gifts; why should I be astonished that they have not the same belief? How much is this belief itself linked with *physical* and *moral* circumstances!

But is this holy religion, which appears to me so limited in its progress, and by which a benevolent heart would desire, that the whole world were enlightened, to remain  
for

for ever within its present limits? How many different means may not Providence have in reserve, to enable it one day to surmount with splendor those narrow limits to which it is now confined? What precious monuments, what demonstrative proofs, still buried in the bosom of the earth, or under ruins, may He not draw thence, at the time marked by his wisdom! What future revolutions, in the great political bodies, now in possession of our globe, may not be fore-ordained as to time and manner, in the designs of Supreme Goodness! May not that nation, which is the most ancient and most singular of all nations; which is dispersed, and as it were *planted*, for seventeen centuries, in



in the midst of the nations, without ever being incorporated with them, without ever forming one *distinct* nation of itself; which is the faithful depositary of the most ancient oracles, the perpetual and living monument of the truth of the new oracles; may not this nation, I say, be one day, in the hand of Providence, one of the great instruments of his designs, in favour of that religion, which it does not yet acknowledge?

If the doctrine does not produce greater *moral* effects among most of those who profess it, shall I ascribe this to its imperfection, or want of *sufficient* motives? But do I know any system of doctrine, whose principles

ples tend more directly to the happiness of *universal* society, and of each individual member? Is there any, which presents motives better calculated to influence the judgment and the heart? It exalts mortal man to the throne of GOD, and extends his hopes to eternity.

But in promulgating this sublime law, the Lawgiver of nature has not transformed into mere *machines* the intelligent beings to whom he gave it. He has left them the *physical* power of observing or of violating it. He has thus put into their own hands the decision of their lot. He has set before their eyes good and evil, happiness and misery.

To

To object against the doctrine of the Founder, because all its professors are not *saints*, is to object against philosophy, because all who profess it are not *philosophers*. Is it therefore true, that philosophy is not qualified to make philosophers? Shall I judge of any doctrine by its effects alone? Will it not be more equitable to judge of it by its principles, its maxims, its motives, and by the fitness of all these to produce *the end* proposed? If, notwithstanding the excellence of this doctrine, and its fitness to produce the end proposed by it, I am forced to acknowledge, that it does not always succeed, I can from this conclude only, that the prejudices, passions, and tempers of men frequently weaken

weaken or destroy the impresson which this doctrine would naturally make upon the soul. This does not at all surprize me; because I easily conceive, that an intelligent and free being cannot be *constrained* by *motives*, and that *reasons* and *arguments* are not *compulsory* causes. It is very observable also, that all the men who make external profession of a doctrine are not inwardly convinced of its truth.

And if, upon the whole, I am convinced, that the number of real sages, whom any doctrine can form, is very small, I ought not to be astonished at this, because I perceive, that great excellence, in no profession whatever, can at any time be very general; and that it must be  
less

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less so, in the profession of virtue, than in any other. But is not virtue, though less perfect, still virtue? Is not gold, though mixed with other matter, still gold? If I would be always just, should I not estimate this doctrine by the good it has produced, however small that may be, and by all the evils which it has prevented? And above all if the doctrine in question prescribed the silent performance of good works, of *good*, rather than of *splendid* works; if it required, that the left hand should not know what the right hand did; I should therefore infer, that it was impossible to calculate all the advantages which society could derive from such a doctrine.

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## SECTION XIX.

THE PROOFS OF CHRISTIANITY  
ARE NOT SUITED TO THE CA-  
PACITY OF ALL MEN.—AN-  
SWER.

ANOTHER difficulty demands examination : Ought not a doctrine, which was to be announced to all nations of the earth ; which was to give to the whole human race assurances of *immortality* ; which proceeded from Wisdom itself ; ought not this doctrine to have been founded upon proofs, which all men, of all times and of all places, could have apprehended with equal ease, and against which no *reasonable* ob-  
L jection

jection could be raised? At the same time, how much knowledge is requisite to collect, to understand, and to estimate those proofs! How many profound, laborious, and intricate enquiries, does not this knowledge presuppose! How few pursue it with success! What talents, what sagacity, what discernment are required, in comparing the proofs, in estimating the degree of probability in each, in judging of the whole of the probabilities united together, in balancing the proofs and objections, in determining the force of the objections in each kind of proof, in refuting those objections, and in drawing from the whole, conclusions which produce certainty! Would a doctrine, which supposed so many extraordinary qualities of the understanding

standing and of the heart, so much knowledge, so many enquiries, be at all adapted to every individual of the human race? Would it be properly calculated to afford men reasonable assurances of future happiness? Could it dispel their doubts, strengthen and augment the hopes of reason, bring life and immortality to light?

I disguise not this difficulty: I do not endeavour to enfeeble it: I present it to myself in its full force: perhaps it is not unanswerable. Of this I wish to be certain. I, therefore, examine it more attentively, and analyze it, if possible.

I acknowledge that man, by the light of reason alone, could not at-



tain to the certainty of a future state. He could, therefore, be conducted to this certainty by *extraordinary* means only. I can easily conceive, that the acquisition of new faculties, or perhaps a great degree of perfection in his present faculties alone, might have brought this state of futurity within the reach of his *intuitive* knowledge, and enabled him to contemplate it in some respects as he does his present existence. I conceive, likewise, that an internal revelation, or external miracles, could have given to man that certainty so necessary to his happiness, and thereby supplied the imperfection of his present faculties.

But the acquisition of new faculties, or a great degree of perfection  
in

in the present, would have rendered man a being very different from that known under the denomination, *man*. And as all the parts of our world are in harmony, and in strict relation with each other, and with the whole system, it is evident, that if man, the principal being of our planet, had been changed, he would have been no longer in relation with this planet, in which he was to pass the first moments of his existence. An eye much more penetrating, the touch incomparably more delicate, &c. would have exposed him to continual torture. It would have been necessary, therefore, to have changed the œconomy of the planet itself, to bring it into relation with the new œconomy of man.

I perceive now, that the difficulty, considered in this point of view, amounts to this: Why has not God made another earth? Why has he not created another universe? For the earth is joined to the universe, as man is to the earth. There is no single part of the system, which has not its reason in the whole. Can I pretend to say, that, in the work of Supreme Intelligence, there is any thing whatever, *unconnected* with that work, and at the same time making a *part* of it? If, notwithstanding the extreme weakness of my talents, and defectiveness of my knowledge; if, notwithstanding the great imperfection of my organs, I fail not to discover so many connections, so many relations, so much harmony between the different parts of the world  
which

which I inhabit; if these connections multiply, combine, and diversify, in proportion as I multiply, combine, and diversify my observations and experiments; is it not extremely probable, that, if my faculties and instruments were incomparably more perfect, I should discover the same connections, the same relations, the same harmony every where, even in the minutest particles? And this must be the case, since the greater are always composed of smaller parts, and these again of still smaller, &c. and since every whole must essentially depend upon the order and harmony of its parts.

It would, therefore, be very unphilosophical to wish, that the Author of the universe had changed the



œconomy of man, to afford him greater certainty of his future state. Nor would it be less so, to wish, that such assurances had been afforded to him by an *internal* revelation. For this revelation must have been universal, or extended to every individual of the human race: since the certainty of a future happiness would be equally necessary to all. But as it is agreeable to the œconomy of man, to be conducted by his *senses*, and by *reflection*: would an internal and universal revelation, perpetuated from age to age, bear any relation to the present constitution of man? And if the happiness he is to enjoy in a future state, be connected with the application he made of his reason, in his enquiries into the foundations of that happiness;

ness; how could he have applied his reason to this noble enquiry, when an internal and irresistible revelation had rendered this exercise of the understanding useless?

There remained one other *extraordinary* way by which man could be conducted to this desirable certainty, which reason alone could not give. This was by miracles, palpable, numerous, and diverse, chained to each other, and indissolubly linked with circumstances to characterize them, and to determine their *end*. This was evidently the only way known to us, which makes no change in the constitution of man, and leaves him the free exercise of all his faculties.

But if miracles were designed to manifest to man the will of the Supreme Being; if they were, in some respects, the physical expression of this will, all men have an equal right to this extraordinary favour, and might aspire to the sight of miracles; and if, in order to satisfy the wants or desires of each individual of the human race, miracles had been universal or perpetual, how could they have preserved their quality of *extraordinary signs*? How could they have been distinguished from the *ordinary* course of nature?

It was, therefore, agreeable to the very nature of miracles, that they should be performed in a certain *place*, and in a certain *time*. Now this relation to place and time, this  
neces-

necessary relation, evidently supposes *testimony*, or oral and written tradition. Tradition itself supposes a certain language, understood by them to whom it might be transmitted. This language could not be universal, perpetual, unalterable; such a language would no more suit the oeconomy of our planet, than a perfect resemblance, either physical or moral, in all the individuals of the human race.

So that it was a natural consequence of the vicissitude of all human things; that the language in which the witnesses of the miraculous facts have published their *deposition*, should become a dead language, and be understood only by the learned. It was also a consequence



quence of the vicissitude of things in this lower world, that the *originals* of the deposition should be lost, that the first *copies* of those originals should likewise be lost; that the latter copies should exhibit a great number of *variations*; that a multitude of minute facts, and minute circumstances, very well known to contemporaries, and proper to throw light upon certain passages of the text, should be unknown to their descendants; that many other circumstances, more or less useful, should also be unknown to them, &c. &c. It was, in fine, a natural consequence of the state of things, and of the nature of the faculties of man, that an *art* should be invented, which had for its direct object, the interpretation of the most important

portant of all books This admirable art was, therefore, to come into being ; it was to enlighten the wise, to dissipate or brighten the clouds which obscured certain truths, and the wise were to enlighten and guide the people.

I shall not return to the objection, that God could, by an extraordinary interposition, have prevented the decay of the language in which the deposition had been written ; that He could, by the same method, have prevented the destruction of the originals of the deposition, the contrarieties, alterations, and variations of the text. I have seen how unreasonable such an objection would be, since it would suppose a continuation of miracles, &c. I have also  
acknow-

known, that those contrarieties, alterations, and variations of the text, do not affect the foundation or sum of the deposition, and that it is not impossible to reconcile those texts in a satisfactory manner.

I shall examine this difficulty still more closely. As the certainty of a future state could be founded upon *real* proofs only, and as the nature and end of miracles required, that they should be performed in a certain place, and in a certain time, it must therefore follow, that the proofs of a future state must, like all other proofs, be submitted to the examination of reason. The proofs of a future state must, therefore, be as much under the jurisdiction of criticism,

ticism, as any other historical facts. And they would thus become the most important object of the enquiries of the learned; and it might enter into the plan of PROVIDENCE, that the learned should collect those proofs, arrange them in a certain order, unfold them, rescue them from obscurity, resolve the objections which they might create, compose particular treatises on all these subjects, and be, to the people, interpreters of that deposition in which were contained the words of eternal life.

I wish to compress my arguments. Man has two ways of obtaining knowledge: the *senses*, and *reflection*. Neither of these ways, nor both united, can lead him to a *moral certainty*



ty of his future existence; there is too great a disproportion between them, and the nature of the things which are the objects of this *certain-ty*. Man, therefore, could not be directed to this certainty, by any other than an extraordinary method; but this direction was to be given to a certain intelligent and moral being, to a man, that is to say, to a *mixed being*, endowed with certain faculties, and whose faculties are confined to certain limits. If, then, this extraordinary method consisted in giving man new faculties, or in changing the present power of his faculties; it would not have been *man* that would have been directed to this certainty; it would have been a being very different from man. It was therefore necessary,

sary, that this *extraordinary* method should bear such a relation to the present constitution of man, that without producing any change therein, it might sufficiently convince his reason of the certainty of a future state. Miracles were this method; for nothing was more proper to prove to man, that the Lord of nature *had spoken*. But if miracles had been wrought in every place, and at every time, they would have returned again into the *ordinary* course of nature; and it would be no longer possible to ascertain, whether the Lord of nature had spoken. Miracles, therefore, must have been wrought in a *certain place*, and at a *certain time*. They must, therefore, like all other facts, be subjected to the rules of *testimony*. Reason must  
apply

apply those rules, and by this application, judge of the reality of those facts. And because those facts were miraculous, (and miraculous facts demand a greater number of testimonies, and testimonies of greater weight, in order to be believed,) it was requisite, that this kind of proof should be given by *witnesses*, who in the highest degree conjoined the *conditions*, which in the eyes of reason establish the *credibility* of any fact whatsoever. I say, *of any fact whatsoever*, because it appears to me most evident, that miracles are not less facts, though they should not be comprehended within the sphere of the common or ordinary laws of nature. Reason will then acquiesce in the proofs which miracles afford, if upon applying to them  
the

the rules of sound criticism and strict logic, they appear to be solidly established.

I shall add only one reflection more, and then I think I shall have satisfied myself as to the difficulty proposed in the beginning of the section. Have I not very much exaggerated this difficulty? Are great talents, such various and exalted knowledge, indeed necessary to form a sound judgment of the proofs of this revelation, which the wants of human nature solicit from Supreme Goodness? Will not a good understanding, which is impartial, and disengaged from the prejudices of false philosophy; will not a good and honest heart, a moderate degree of attention, be sufficient to estimate



timate palpable proofs, collected by men of the best qualifications, with order and perspicuity, in books which are suited to the capacities of all the world? That a judicious reader may be able to judge of the truth of a particular history, or of a particular doctrine, is it absolutely necessary, that he possess all the talents and knowledge of the authors, who have collected the proofs of that history or doctrine? Does the decision of any point whatever, indispenfibly demand, that all the judges have the same measure of knowledge, the same penetration, the same talents, which they have who report it? Does it not happen every day, that we are obliged to have recourse to the skilful, or to teachers of arts and sciences, upon very many

many things more or less necessary? Why then should not the people have recourse to the learned, to select and estimate the proofs of that revelation, whose certainty they endeavour to place within their reach? Besides, are there not some of those proofs which may be easily apprehended by the most limited understandings? How strongly does the excellency of the morality of JESUS CHRIST strike the honest, feeling soul! How much does the character of CHRIST himself excite the admiration and reverence of every sincere friend to truth and virtue! How deeply is this character stamped upon the first disciples! What lives! what manners! what examples! what benevolence! what charity! Could the people behold such things, and remain unconcerned?

concerned? They do not, perhaps, believe from such proofs, as will convince a man of learning; but they may believe from proofs most adapted to their capacity; and their belief will not be less rational, less consolatory, nor less practical.

## SECTION XX.

A DIFFICULTY ARISING FROM  
HUMAN LIBERTY—ANSWERED.

**S**HALL I oppose the *moral* necessity of human actions against the doctrine of the Founder of Christianity? Shall I pretend, that this kind of necessity excludes all *imputation*, and consequently all law and religion? Do I not clearly see, that moral necessity is, in fact, no *real necessity*? That it is nothing more, than *certainty*, considered in actions which are *free*? Because a man  
must



must love himself; because he cannot but determine for that which his understanding has judged to be most eligible; because his will tends essentially to a real or apparent good, does it follow that man is purely a machine? Does it follow, that laws cannot direct him to his true end? that he cannot observe them, that he has no understanding, no will, no liberty; that his actions cannot, in any sense, be imputed to him; that he is not susceptible of happiness or of misery; that he cannot search for the one, nor avoid the other; that, in a word, he is not a *moral* being? I lament, that the poverty of language has introduced into philosophy that unfortunate term *moral necessity*, so improper in itself, and

and which creates so much confusion in a thing most simple, which cannot be explained with too much precision and clearness.

## SECTION XXI.

CHRISTIANITY UNFAVOURABLE  
TO PATRIOTISM.\*—HAS PRO-  
DUCED GREAT EVILS UPON  
THE EARTH—ANSWERS.

**S**HALL I object to the doctrine of JESUS CHRIST, that it is not favourable to *patriotism*, but *calculated to make men slaves*? Would not the history of its progress and establishment immediately contradict me? Were there ever any subjects more loyal, any citizens more virtu-

\* Vid. Beattie's Evidences of Christianity, ch.  
iii. sect. v.

ous, any souls more generous, any soldiers more intrepid, than those new men, scattered throughout the state, every where persecuted, always humane, always beneficent, always faithful to the prince, and to his ministers? If the lively and profound sentiment of the nobleness of our being is the true source of greatness of soul, what will not be his greatness of soul, and elevation of thought, whose views are not bounded by the limits of time?

Shall I repeat, that true disciples of JESUS would not form a state which could subsist? "Why not," answers a sage\*, who knew how to estimate things, and who cannot be

\* Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws, book xxiv. ch. 6.



suspected either of credulity or partiality; "Why not?" They would be citizens well informed of their duties, and who possessed great zeal to perform them; they would be very sensible of the rights of natural defence; the more they believed they owed to religion, the more they would think they owed to their country. "The principles of this religion being deeply engraven upon the heart, would be infinitely more strong than the false honour of monarchies, the human virtue of republics, and the servile fear of despotic states."

Shall I take pleasure in exaggerating the evils which this doctrine has occasioned in the world; the civil wars it has produced; the  
blood

blood it has shed; the atrocious acts of injustice it has committed; and the calamities of every kind which accompanied it in the first ages, and which were renewed in ages much later, &c.? But shall I for ever confound the abuse, or the accidental, and perhaps necessary consequences of an excellent thing, with that thing itself? What! could a doctrine which breathed nothing but mildness, charity, and mercy, create those horrid evils? Could so pure, so holy a doctrine, dictate those crimes? Could the word of the Prince of life arm brother against brother, and teach them the infernal art of improving every kind of punishment? Could toleration itself sharpen the poignard, prepare the torture, erect the scaf-

fold, and kindle the pile? No, I shall not confound darkness with light, furious fanaticism with amiable charity. I know that \* “charity suffereth long, and is kind; that it envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; that it doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in justice, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” No, He who went about doing good, placed not the murderous sword in the hands of his children, and dictated not the code of intolerance. The most gentle, the most compassionate, and

\* 1 Corinth. chap. 13.

the most just of men, did not breathe into the hearts of his disciples the spirit of persecution, but kindled in it the divine fire of charity.

“To assert,” says that great man\* whom I have already quoted, “that religion has no restraining power, because it does not always restrain, is to assert, that civil laws have likewise no restraining power. He reasons falsely against religion, who enumerates at great length the evils which it has produced, and overlooks the advantages. Were I to recount all the evils which civil laws monarchial and republican go.

\* Montesquieu, book xxiv. chap. 2.



“vernments, have produced in the  
 “world, I might exhibit a dread-  
 “ful picture. Although it were of  
 “no advantage for subjects to have  
 “religion, yet it would be of ad-  
 “vantage to princes to have reli-  
 “gion, and to whiten with foam  
 “the only bridle which can re-  
 “strain those who fear not human  
 “laws. A prince, who loves and  
 “fears religion, is like the lion  
 “yielding to the hand which  
 “strokes him, or the voice which  
 “soothes him. He who fears but  
 “hates religion, is like the savage  
 “beast, biting the chain that hin-  
 “ders him from flying upon the  
 “passenger. He who has no reli-  
 “gion at all, is that dreadful ani-  
 “mal, which is totally insensible  
 “of

“of liberty, except when devour-  
 “ing and tearing in pieces.”

I rejoice to see this profound and humane writer, this preceptor of kings, trace with his immortal hand, the eulogium of that religion which a good mind will admire ; and this admiration will increase, in proportion as he has made greater progress in philosophy and metaphysics, as he has generalised his ideas, and taken an extensive prospect of things. “Let us set  
 “before our eyes, the continual  
 “massacres of Greek and Roman  
 “kings and generals on the one  
 “hand, and on the other the de-  
 “struction of cities and nations by  
 “those very kings and generals ; a  
 “Timur a Jengizkan ravaging  
 “Asia ; and we shall see, that we

“ owe to religion a certain political  
 “ law in government, and in war a  
 “ certain law of nations; advan-  
 “ tages which human nature can-  
 “ not sufficiently acknowledge.”

“ In consequence of this law of  
 “ nations, the victor, in our days,  
 “ allows the conquered to enjoy  
 “ those great privileges, life, li-  
 “ berty, laws, property, and reli-  
 “ gion in particular, if he is not  
 “ blind to his own interest\*.”

How many domestic virtues, how  
 many works of mercy secretly ex-  
 exercised in the heart, has not this  
 doctrine of life produced, and still  
 produces! How many Socratefes

\* Ibid. book xxiv. chap. 3.

and Epictetuses, disguised under the habits of low mechanics! How much better informed are these mechanics in their duty, and in the future destination of man, than were Socrates and Epictetus!

God forbid that I should be either unjust or ungrateful! I shall carefully reckon up the advantages of religion, and acknowledge, that true philosophy itself is indebted to it, for its birth, progress, and perfection. Dare I affirm, that if the Father of *lights* had not deigned to enlighten mankind, I should not have been an *idolater*? Born, perhaps, in the midst of thick darkness and monstrous superstition, I might have been swallowed up by prejudice, and perceived nothing  
in



in nature, and in my own being, except confusion. And if I had been so happy, or so unhappy, as to have raised a doubt concerning the Author of nature, concerning my present and future destination, &c. that doubt would have been perpetual, I should never have been able to determine it, and it might have been the torment of my life.

Can *true* philosophy, then, forget all that it owes to religion? Though it could give a blow to religion, ought it to glory in doing so, since every blow will infallibly recoil upon itself? Should true religion, in its turn, rise up against philosophy, and forget the important services which it may derive from it?

S E C.

## SECTION XXII.

THE DOCTRINES OBSCURE, AND  
APPARENTLY CONTRARY TO  
REASON.—ANSWERS.

**S**HALL I attack the religion of  
JESUS CHRIST, because of its doc-  
trines? Shall I augment its *myste-*  
*ries*, their *incomprehensibility*, their  
contrariety, at least apparent contra-  
riety to reason?\*

But what right have I to pretend,  
that every thing in nature and in

\* The Doctrines of Christianity are some of  
them above, but none contrary to Reason.  
Vid. Beattie's Evidences of Christianity, ch. iii.  
sect. i. ii.

grace should be clear? How many  
 mysteries are there in nature, which  
 I cannot penetrate? Every man,  
 who has made the works of nature  
 his study, will be able to make out  
 an immense catalogue of difficulties,  
 which can never be explained by  
 the most acute philosopher. Ought I  
 then to be astonished at the obscuri-  
 ty, which envelopes certain doc-  
 trines of religion? Does not this ve-  
 ry obscurity borrow new shades from  
 that which covers *certain* mysteries  
 of nature? Would it be philosophi-  
 cal in me to complain, that God has  
 not given me the eyes and under-  
 standing of an angel, that I might  
 see through all the secrets of nature  
 and of grace? Should I desire, there-  
 fore, that in order to satisfy my im-  
 pertinent curiosity, God had revers-  
 ed

ed the *universal* harmony, and placed me in a higher link of the immense chain of beings? Have I not sufficient light to conduct me surely in the path marked out for me; sufficient *motives* to confirm me in it; hopes sufficient to animate my endeavours, and to excite me to fulfil my destination? How many impenetrable mysteries in *natural religion*, that religion which I believe so conformable to my reason, and in which it glories; that system, which appears to me so harmonious, so well connected in all its parts, so essentially philosophical! How many gulphs contained in the single idea of a *necessary, self-existent being*, which an archangel himself cannot fathom! And without rising up to that FIRST BEING, who, like a vortex



tex, swallows up all the conceptions of created *intelligence*, how many unanswerable questions occur to me concerning my own soul, whose immortality is taught me by natural religion! &c.

But are those doctrines of CHRIST, which appear at first sight so *incomprehensible*, and even *contrary* to my reason, really so much so, as they appear to be? Might not men, perhaps too much prejudiced in favour of their own ideas, or too much prepossessed with the thought that there is always *merit in believing*, and that this merit increases in proportion to the *number* and the *species* of the articles of *belief*; might not these men, I say, have blended *false interpretations* with the emblematical

matical images and *metaphorical* words of Christ, and of his first disciples? Might not they accordingly have altered and multiplied the *doctrines*? Do I not mistake those *interpretations* for the *doctrines* themselves? I go to the purest source of all doctrinal truth: I study that admirable *book*, which fortifies and increases my hopes: I endeavour to interpret it by itself, and not by the dreams and visions of certain commentators: I compare text with text, doctrine with doctrine, each writer with himself, and the whole with the most evident *principles* of *reason*; and after this examination, which requires much reflection, seriousness, impartiality, long continuance, and frequent repetition, I  
see

see the contrarieties disappear,  
 the shades decrease, light shining  
 out of darkness, faith unite with  
 reason, and both *concur* in forming  
 the same *unity*.

## 5 DECD

C O N-

## CONCLUSION.

**F**ROM the whole, this important conclusion results, that there is no ancient history so well attested, as that of the MESSENGER OF THE GOSPEL ; that there are no historical facts supported by so great a number of proofs; by such striking, solid, and various proofs, as are those facts on which the religion of JESUS CHRIST is founded.

Sound logic has taught me to distinguish, with accuracy, the different kinds of certainty, and not to demand rigid *demonstration* in matters of fact, or in things which essentially



entially depend on testimony. I know, that what is called *moral certainty*, is not, and cannot be, *perfect* or *strict certainty*; that this kind of certainty is only a greater or less *probability*, and which is more or less successful in gaining the assent of the mind, as it approaches more or less to that indivisible point, in which *complete* certainty resides.

I know, likewise, that if I adhere to nothing but to evidence, *properly so called*, or to *demonstration*, and believe nothing but what my own senses attested to me, I must of necessity fall into the most absurd *pyrrhonism*\*; for what pyrrhonism can be more absurd, than that which seriously doubts all the facts of history, physics, &c. and which entirely re-  
jects.

\* Universal doubt.

jects every kind of testimony? What life can be more wretched and limited than that man's, who trusts to nothing but the report of his *own senses*, and who obstinately refuses every analogical conclusion?

I shall not say, that the truth of Christianity is *demonstrated*; this expression, admitted and repeated with too much satisfaction by the best *apologists*, would certainly be very *improper*. I shall only say, that the facts, upon which the credibility of the Christian religion is founded, appear to me so *probable*, that if I rejected them, I think I should violate the surest rules of logic, and renounce the most common *maxims* of *reason*.

I have

I have endeavoured to examine my own heart to the bottom; and as I have discovered in it no secret motive which can induce me to reject a doctrine so well calculated to supply the weakness of my reason, to console me in my distresses, to perfect my being, I receive this doctrine, as the greatest benefit which God can bestow upon man; and I would likewise receive it, though I considered it in no other light, but as the best system of PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY.

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